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VOICES

Grandma Hospitality

by Terri Lackey

When I was a girl, my family of seven piled into our old Chevrolet at least twice a year and drove 14 hours straight from Nashville, Tenn., to Oklahoma City. Mom, Dad, two brothers, two sisters, me, and a dog and cat took off to see both sets of grandparents for summer and Christmas vacations.

I could make that drive with my eyes closed. And usually did because before we five children got into the car, my mom plied us with liquid Dramamine. She said we got carsick, but I think she just wanted an hour or two of peace and quiet. I barely made it to "my spot" in the floorboard of the back seat before I was contentedly snoozing.

But I was wide awake in Little Rock, Ark., because that's where we ate "authentic" Mexican food and the only time we ate out as a family. My dad was a bit of a penny pincher.

And this brings me to one of the life lessons Christa von Zychlin writes about in "Six Lessons I Learned on the Road."

My favorite of her lessons (learned while on a road trip with *her* family) is: "Take time for meals. Splurge a little. ...Yes, we all need bread for the journey, whether it's homemade or gourmet or just something as special and different as pancakes and syrup. ...Good food keeps grumbling down and spirits up."

Speaking of good food: Unlike my mother, my grandmother was a great cook. Sometimes we even had fried chicken for breakfast. She offered that rare treat because she knew we loved it and she was a hospitable hostess.

We weren't exactly the refugees or immigrants Else Schardt writes about in her article, "Who? Me? A Refugee?" but as Christians, we could sure extend my grandmother's standards of hospitality to all who come into our homes, churches, or community.

"God calls us to reach out to the alien and stranger and proclaim God's love for all," Schardt writes.

That's what Linda Johnson Seyenkulo says in "Traveling Mercies: Hospitality."

She writes: "Through the stories of the Bible, we are called to offer hospitality. Hospitality is about receiving and inviting people in our homes, yes, but also in our churches, our friendships, and all aspects of our lives."

In "Along the Way," the summer Bible study by the Rev. Julie Kanarr, we meet several biblical travelers and witness different levels of hospitality.

Whether you are doing the summer study with women from your church or at home alone, we hope you invite others to share the good news of what you are learning.

One way to do that is to ask your friends to travel with you through the 2012-13 Bible study, "Gathered by God" by Audrey West (see more on page 46).

Like Christa says in her article: "We believe in a God of forgiveness, camaraderie, and joy-filled surprise. Therefore we needn't fear setting out on a trip of any kind."

Safe travels!

Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Gather*.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Companions Along the Way

by Mariel McMullen

I had recently moved to a new town and found a new church. I was gradually getting acquainted, and making new friends, but feeling sad and alone. I was recovering from the sudden death of my older sister and only sibling. Our parents were already gone. I felt my family had all gone and left me.

I had a husband, children, and grandchildren, but losing the people I had grown up with revealed a strong bond which I hadn't known was there. I didn't feel that close to her, but after she died I realized how much I missed my sister. I needed more companionship. Perhaps, I thought, it was time to form a contemplative group like the one I had led in my former church.

At my new church I offered to lead a contemplation and meditation group similar to group spiritual direction. Six ladies responded, and we began to meet three times a month. On the first day our hostess welcomed us at the door, as did Sassy, a small brown dog with huge ears and a furiously wagging tail.

We began with "check in," where we each briefly answered the question, "How are you arriving today?" which meant, how are you? I passed out the handouts I had prepared and explained, "The purpose of this group is to foster a closer relationship with God by becoming aware of the Holy in our inmost selves, in nature, in our experiences, and in silence."

We read verses, discussed what they said to us, thought, spent time in meditative silence, and began to experience

God as close and loving. Discussion time brought out healing stories from our lives which needed to be told and witnessed.

Each week we embraced a new question. When we are in the midst of a storm of circumstances that bring fear and doubt, how can we figuratively walk on water instead of sinking? What does it mean to let God be God in our lives? How do we live in the present moment and why try? One day a member of our group got out of her van and called out, "What are you going to challenge us with today?"

After meeting for a year, I asked the group why they had first come and what they had gained from it. Their answers included:

"I feel closer to God now."

"At first I came from curiosity. Now I come because during the week I get so busy I need to collect myself and remember why I'm a Christian and why I'm on the Earth."

"The group gave me a sense of peace and fullness inside and a closer relationship to God. The sharing helped me see that other people feel the same way I do."

"I came because I was so busy I didn't do devotions during the week. Now I keep the handouts and use them at home. I really liked the fellowship."

As I settled down to work on the next meeting's theme, I suddenly realized that I hadn't felt sad or lonely for a long time. Three years later we still meet and are companions along the way. ■

Mariel McMullen has a certificate in spiritual direction and attends First Lutheran Church in St. Helens, Ore.

TRAVELING MERCIES

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo

HOSPITALITY

[hos-pi-tal-i-tee] (noun)

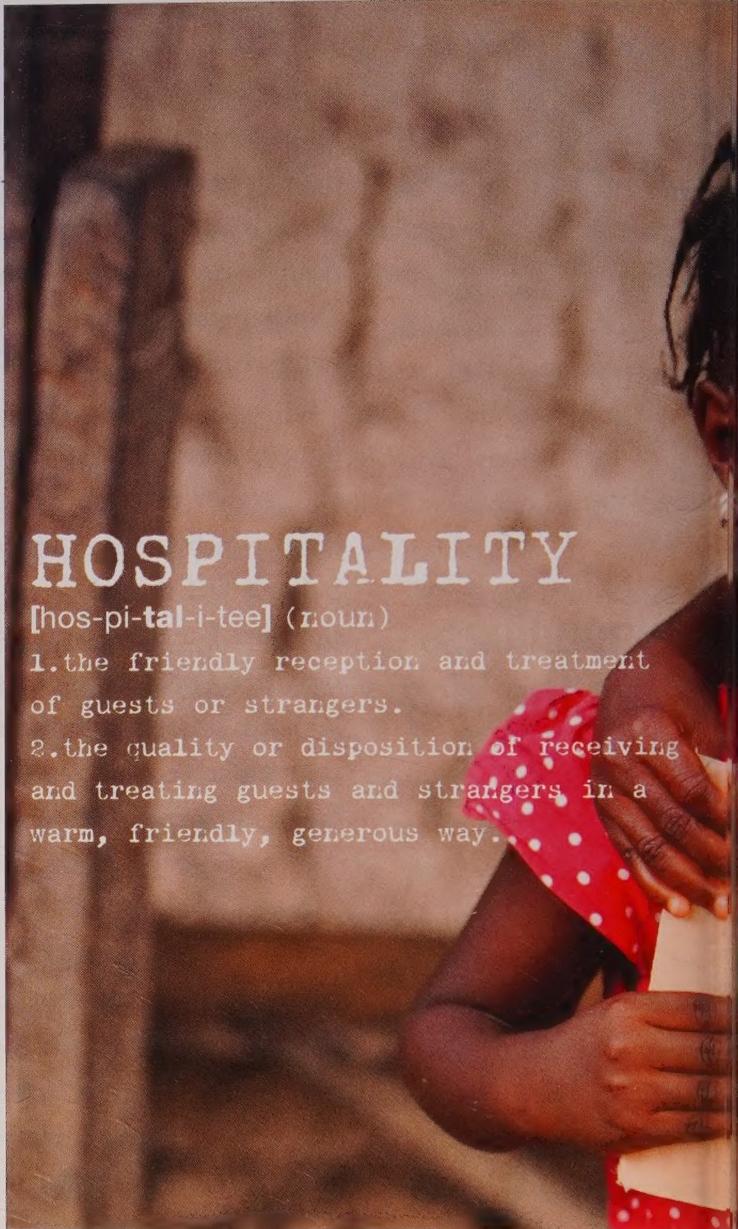
1. the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers.
2. the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.

Through the stories of the Bible, we are called to offer hospitality. Hospitality is about receiving and inviting people in our homes, yes, but also in our churches, our friendships, and all aspects of our lives. Hospitality sounds gracious, wonderful, and Christian. Misused, misunderstood, or missing, it can be a stumbling block to enjoying a family visit at your home, to a growing evangelism program at a church, or to welcoming that new neighbor into a community.

When hospitality goes well, it is life-giving. However, it is often unnoticed or taken for granted. It can also be offered in ways that are unfamiliar to the one receiving it.

RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES

Several years ago, my children and I were having a discussion about how families are different. As we talked about this, I said, "Well, you know Daddy's and Mommy's families are different. What are the differences you notice between them?" Ours is a bi-racial, cross-cultural marriage (my husband is from Liberia),





"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home."

Luke 10:38

and I was expecting a discussion on food, dress, levels of noise, even race. But what came up was *hospitality*.

"Well," said my oldest, "When we go to stay with anyone from your family, it's three, four days at the max. With Daddy's family you can go and stay for a year."

"Yeah," added her younger brother, "Or forever."

Now, the children were not making a judgment about either side of our family. They were saying what they had experienced in our families' interactions: Hospitality is different depending on which side of the family you are visiting.

People from my husband's side of the family usually stay with us longer than people from my side of the family. My family tends to come and stay for a day or two—and we do the same with them. People from my husband's side of the family usually come from far away, while most of my family and friends live less than a day's journey from our house.

It might seem like that's why his family stays longer than mine, and vice versa. But there's more to it than that.

There is a basic difference in how we were brought up to offer and to experience hospitality. This has to do

with cultural norms about visiting and living, about food and cooking, about sleeping arrangements and sharing. It is most evident to me in a phrase used by both our families, but meaning two very different things.

FEELING AT HOME

Often, when you visit someone, you will hear that person say, "Welcome to my home."

In most of the Western part of the world, that means: You, the guest, are welcome into *my* space. I am glad you are here. I look forward to talking, eating, and sharing space with you for a while. "A while" is usually not laid out in a clear way but, to quote my kids, it is often "three, four days max," depending on the relationships of the people involved.

In the Liberian culture of my husband's family, when someone says, "Welcome to my house," they mean my house *and your* house—*our* house. As you enter into the house, you become part of the household. The sentiment of "I am glad you are here, and look forward to talking, eating, and sharing space with you" is included, but it seems to me there is a difference from my Western culture.

In this understanding of hospitality, guests are considered a part of your family, your household; they are welcome there for as long as they want or need to stay. They make themselves at home. They help with the cooking (they may even cook something without checking to see if it is okay). It is how you live when you are at home.

In the culture of my family, guests are welcome, but they are guests. There's a tacit understanding that they need to ask permission to do certain things; they are not quite at home.

Having said that, it is also true that there are limits and expectations in both types of hospitality. The tricky thing is knowing what they are, especially since most of them are never articulated. Some are not even conscious.

EXPECTATIONS AND AWARENESS

In any culture, one of the ways you make guests feel welcome is to make sure that they are comfortable. Whether they are in *my* house or *our* house, helping people be comfortable is a basic premise of good hospitality. One cold day in Liberia, my soon-to-be mother-in-law offered me the chance to take a bath and asked if I wanted her to heat the water.

I said, "Oh, no, that's not necessary."

At which point, she said, "Okay," and walked away.

I felt vaguely disquieted and sat down to figure out why. I realized the problem came from my cultural understanding: When someone offers hospitality, you were supposed to refuse it. They would offer it again and you would refuse it again. They would offer it one more time, and then you would say, "Well, if you are sure it won't be any trouble, that would be really great."

My mother-in-law did not know that sequence (although I must have looked shocked, because she did come back with another offer of hot water, which I accepted without hesitation.) Here's the thing: I did not really know my expectations about hospitality until it did not go the way I assumed it would.

Hospitality practices are often that way. They are unspoken, sometimes unperceived—until something happens to bring them to consciousness. Once that happens, you are much more aware about offering and accepting it.

It's not just Westerners who are unaware. After living in Liberia for two months as a new bride, I had hosted many people in our home. I understood that it was a terrible insult to serve something to someone with your left hand. This has to do with cleanliness issues that have developed into a tradition of hospitality. You *never* serve someone anything with your left hand.

Here's the thing: No one told me that. When I heard a reference in a sermon to the left hand and people laughed, I asked my husband what it was about. He then told me about the strong cultural sanctions

against offering things with your left hand.

I was aghast, thinking there must have been many times I had extended a plate of food to someone with my left hand. He assured me that people would understand since I was new to the country and the culture. Then another thought struck me. "Please tell me," I said, my heart filled with dread, "I didn't offer communion to anyone with my left hand, did I?"

You see, no one told me because everyone just *knew*. I didn't ask because I was acting on the cultural assumptions with which I had been raised. There was nothing about the left hand and hospitality in anything that I learned growing up.

THE WORKING OF GOD'S SPIRIT

From those kinds of expériences we learn that it is important to run the risk of looking stupid by asking questions. As hosts, we now know that we need to articulate clearly to our guests what we can and cannot do. We have rules about what rooms are guest rooms and how we keep public spaces clear and clean in anticipation of the arrival of visitors.

It is equally important to ask how things work when we are the guests. I ask my hosts, "How exactly does this work? What am I supposed to do?" about some of the simplest of tasks, because the culture could be forming expectations about the task in a different way than my understanding.

We all live in a world where we increasingly encounter people who have grown up with different cultural assumptions and practices. We need to take those differences seriously—to talk about them and try to be caring and understanding and responsible when we are together.

Some of us have grown up in cultures where we expect that our experience is the norm—and we are finding out that is simply not true. Others of us have endured hospitality that was so foreign to us, it actually felt inhospitable.

Still others have the opportunity to be in situations every day where there are a variety of cultural assumptions about hospitality—some of which we understand and others we are learning and may never totally understand.

The key is to be open—open to new experiences, open to different ways of doing things. We also need to be open to questioning why *we* do something a certain way. We need to be open to the working of God's spirit as we try to make hospitality—intentional hospitality—central to the way we do things at home, at church, and in our communities.

This may involve taking the time to talk together about the ways we do things. It may even involve making mistakes that on the surface look really dumb.

Hospitality requires that we stretch our comfort zones to receive visitors, strangers, friends, or relatives in welcoming ways. It requires being able to receive the gifts of hospitality that are returned to us in surprising and often unexpected ways.

I like to think about hospitality as opening myself to adventures. Instead of knowing exactly what is going to happen, you get ready to experience what can be new and different. In opening ourselves to the surprise of hospitality that takes nothing for granted and is flexible about expectations, we enter into a new relationship between host and guest. It is a rewarding way to live.

My children did not analyze the difference between the two sides of our family. It just became a part of what they know (and love) our family to be—wonderfully diverse and complex, a part of God's love and care for them in this world. It's a measure of the depth and breadth of how God does things in the world. God's people offer hospitality to one another in many and varied ways. ☺

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo serves as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, Ill. She and her husband, Jensen Seyenkulo, wrote the 2010–2011 Bible study "People of God: Unity in the Midst of Diversity."



FAMILY MATTERS

Washing Feet

by Sue Gamelin

I don't like checking

the box labeled *retired* when a form asks me about my occupation. It isn't that I don't like being retired; I love it. That's not the issue. What I don't like is being lumped into one category that is meant to define all 40 million or so retired people in the United States. We're more than people who are "65 and older." We're individuals, and we each live these years out differently.

As 2010 began, I knew that I wanted to retire from public ministry. I had been serving as a pastor since my husband, Tim, and I were ordained together in 1980, our four children watching with varying degrees of understanding. I was 37 years old then. As 67 approached, I recognized that the deep well of energy that had fueled me for the past 30 years had become shallower. I would be so tired after a Sunday of worship leadership, a hospital visit or two, and a crazy and poignant evening with the teens in our "Youtheran Luth" group.

Retirement wasn't Tim's game plan. Although he knew that our time at the congregation we had been serving was drawing to a close, he wanted another call to a congregation. The blessing was that we could support each other's decision. How difficult it is when one partner is ready to make a change that affects the other member of the marriage, and the other one doesn't want that change no way, no how. We've known those times. This wasn't one of them.

I told Tim that he would never get a call at age 67—never. He did. He is hap-

pily serving a congregation 25 minutes to the east of our home, instead of the congregation we had served together, 20 minutes to the west.

A dear friend recently sent me an email with news from her home congregation. At the end of her message she asked, "Does Tim wonder about your time at home while he continues at church?" Aha! Here we are, back to the reason why I don't like to check the box marked *retired*. It's been important to me all my life to realize that there is a variety of options as people make choices about how they live, regardless of gender, ethnic background, race, socio-economic class, sexual identity, and age. And yet there seems to me to be one prevailing paradigm, or model, for being retired.

I began to glimpse that model after Tim and I announced that we were leaving the congregation, and that I was going to retire. "Where are you going to move?" people would ask. "Closer to your kids? Back to Florida?" Those may be good options for some retired people, but not for all of us. For one thing, our children move all the time. My mom has long said, "I only use pencil to write your kids' addresses in my address book." Setting up a home near one of them would mean waiting until a "For Sale" sign would go up in that family's yard. And Florida? We did the Florida thing backwards; we moved there when we were in our 20s, enjoying our young adult years in the sun and sand.

We didn't assume that we would move when one or both of us retired. We

love our home. We love our community. And, most importantly, we love the opportunities for ministry that we have right where we are.

Opportunities for ministry? Tim, for sure. But you, Sue? You're retired! Many people assume that being retired means putting something heavy down. It doesn't mean picking something up, unless it is a hobby. I don't have any problems with people having hobbies. Golf is great; I grew up with a golfing dad and loved following him around the course as his caddy. But I took golf in college, and passed the course only because I tried really hard.

Arts and crafts are marvelous. My mother and sister have always been wonderful knitters and crocheters and adventurous handymen. It is amazing what glue and gold paint can do. I didn't get those genes. The dress I started when Mom set up sewing classes for me the summer I was 14 never did get finished. I love reading, but as an exquisite pleasure at the end of the day, not as my avocation. Travel for pleasure? I'm grateful that I've done lots of that through the years.

What I love to do, have always loved to do, and want to do until I am 94.93 years of age (the age at which a "life expectancy calculator" says I will die) is wash people's feet. Not literally, although I would do that if dirty, weary feet were the issue for someone in need. I want to be

there for people when they are hurting, and I want to bring the gospel to them in word and action. I am a follower of Jesus. I have watched him wash feet, and I have heard him call me to serve in this way.

Our community offers me amazing opportunities to wash feet. And so I have retired to the homeless shelters in our town, where I teach spirituality classes and help with a job readiness program. I've retired to a transitional housing site for 14 men who are in recovery from addiction, where I lead a weekly session about God's work in their lives. I've retired to the local hospital, where I am a chaplain on call one night a week for emergencies of all sorts. And I've retired to my congregation, where I get to be with kids and bring healthy snacks for them every week. If one of the parents or our own children calls

and asks, "Can you come and ..." that takes priority. I go! There are feet, large and small, in those families that cry out for washing, too.

It is true that I am at home more, and I am more gentle with myself as I live out each day. I have learned in the past two years that it is just as important to learn what I don't want to do as it is to affirm what I want to do.

I want to be at home more. I spent a great deal of time away from home over my 30 years as a congregational pastor and as an assistant to bishops in two different synods. I look back on those years, and regret how much I missed by being gone so much.

These precious years offer me an opportunity to be with Tim much more than I was in those busy years, and for the two of us to jump into our car or onto a plane to be with people we love. What a blessing!

I am retired, but when I check that box on your form, don't assume that you know what life is like for me, or for each of the 40 million who check that box. Just ask us what we are doing in our retirement and settle back to listen. We'll be glad to tell you. ☺

The Rev. Sue Gamelin is a retired ELCA pastor who washes feet in her community in North Carolina. She and her husband, Tim, have four grown children and their spouses and nine grandchildren.





Who? Me? A Refugee?

by Else Schardt



photo: The author's family when she was a child.

People often have definite and sometimes opposing ideas about the ways our nation should deal with refugees and immigrants. Misunderstanding and fear often get involved in our take on the issue.

What classifies a person as an immigrant or refugee? Does your family history include immigrants? Are you a neighbor or a friend to a refugee?

Refugees are people who are forced to leave their home countries because of war, environmental disasters, political persecution, and/or religious or ethnic intolerance. Immigrants often choose to leave their country because they are joining family members in another country or they are attempting to better their lives economically.

In Hebrews, we are reminded: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). Do these words still apply today?

When I was an infant, our family home was a simple wood structure built of hand-hewn boards high in the mountains in the Finschhafen area of Papua New Guinea (called New Guinea until its independence in 1975).

My father was born in New Guinea to Australian missionary parents and was educated and ordained a pastor in Adelaide, Australia. He served as a missionary in New Guinea after 1933. In 1939 he fell in love and married a young German woman who had migrated to Australia under difficult circumstances and who had answered a call to missionary service in New Guinea.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, the Lutheran mission work in New Guinea suddenly faced a heart-breaking dilemma. For years, Germans, Americans, and Australians worked together peacefully among the many tribes of New Guinea. They served by teaching, proclaiming the gospel, attending to the sick, and studying several of the hundreds of languages of that tropical island country. Now Germany and its allies had become enemies of Australia and the United States.

The Australian authorities rounded up the German men, sent them to Australia, and incarcerated them in internment camps where they were forced to remain until long after the war's end. When Japanese warplanes dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor in Honolulu in December 1941, the Allies were plunged into the war.

Days later, when I was one year old, my mother and I were evacuated with many other missionary women and children to Australia.

FRIENDLY FIRE

My father was forced to join the army—very much against his will. He was deeply opposed to killing another person. As soon as he went to the battle front where the Allies were attempting to re-capture territory from the invading army, his value was recognized—he knew a lot about the terrain and medical care. He tended to wounded soldiers. Malaria and dysentery complicated battle injuries, but my father knew how to relieve some of the symptoms of these terrible diseases.

One day during the war, the Allies (with whom my father was serving) bombed the mission house where we had lived in New Guinea. They were hoping to flush out invading enemy soldiers who had infiltrated the area. With one swoop of a bomber, our family lost shelter and worldly goods to “friendly fire.”

Years later my parents told me about boxes that our village neighbors buried in the tropical jungle. Local residents found a couple of these boxes years later, but others remained lost because those who buried them died in the war. Today my tiny bag of heirlooms from the past includes a music book riddled with worm holes from being underground, a silver-plated knife and fork with my grandmother’s initials engraved on them, and a dictionary in three languages, each precious page crumbling with age but giving me a connection with a past that had been mostly obliterated.

Relatives in Australia kindly offered my mother and me (and later, my father, after his release from the army) refuge in their homes. At that time, generous Australian families took in the German women and children who’d been evacuated to Australia, while their husbands and fathers remained behind bars in internment camps.

After 42 months of separation, with hope fading of a quick end to the war, the women begged the Australian

authorities to let them and their children join the men in the prison camp. Amazingly, their unusual request was granted. The German families were incarcerated, but at least they were together. During the long months which grew into years, these families pooled their knowledge and taught the children—giving music lessons, holding recitals with singing and drama, offering theology lectures, and teaching one another new languages.

Endless red tape delayed their return to mission work in New Guinea, but a wonderful day dawned for all of us when these German families gained permission to return to serve alongside their New Guinean, American, and Australian colleagues.

ONE STORY AMONG MANY

Why do I share this story here? After all, my refugee story is but one among millions. My family and I found housing and protection relatively quickly, and we were not imprisoned. For many families, though, the suffering went on for years.

Recently I heard the compelling story from a woman in our neighborhood who had left Vietnam with her family under dangerous circumstances. Over the past decade, international students we’ve hosted—some of whom were studying here and others who had fled their countries due to war—shared stories of bravery, hunger, and loss. They also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to study in the United States. One pastor, for example, told how he survived a gunshot aimed at his head because it misfired.

Such stories remind us that the experiences of refugees or immigrants who have been denied freedom of choice are complex. Today, thousands of displaced people still have no choice about their status as refugees or immigrants.

Whenever we celebrate our national holidays, we should be sensitive to the feelings of our refugee or immigrant neighbors. When we celebrate Independence Day or D-Day or Pearl Harbor Day, for example,

let's remember that such a day can mark joy for some, but grief or ambivalence for others.

Our international visitors, exchange students, and business colleagues—as well as our new immigrant neighbors—have often experienced hunger, trauma, rejection, prejudice, and profiling.

But immigrants, refugees, and visiting international students are not the only people facing ambivalence in the United States. Today, as we welcome home from war our courageous military personnel who served hazardous tours of duty in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, we should be aware of their feelings. Finding employment, re-integrating into society, and dealing with the trauma they suffered while serving overseas are significant obstacles for them. True, this country is their home, but they may feel unwelcome or misunderstood when they return to their communities.

OFFERING SHELTER AND PROTECTION

The United States will soon welcome more refugees from countries in which our military has recently fought. Some have helped the U.S. troops and are not safe in their own countries. How can we best assist political refugees from a country with which our nation was at war? What is our responsibility today when we welcome new refugees to our neighborhoods and congregations?

When my parents' German colleagues were suddenly evacuated from New Guinea during World War II and placed among Australian families, it must have been difficult for both hosts and refugees. Through God's mercy and love, their host families shel-

tered them while the men were imprisoned. For years, the women and children stayed with families who opened their homes—and their already thinly stretched war-time-rations budgets.

God's people, as far back as the times of Genesis and Exodus, faced homelessness and rejection. The infant Jesus and his young parents became refugees when they had to flee to Egypt to escape the schemes of King Herod. When we read these biblical narratives about displaced persons, we find common threads of fear, rejection, and violence. Yet as we continue reading the stories, we also see God's protection in seemingly impossible situations.

God calls us to reach out to the alien and stranger and proclaim God's love for all. Hospitality involves risks today even as it did in biblical times. Our challenge is to offer a helping hand and kindness in the spirit of God's love.

TO LEARN MORE

To find out about ministry and service to refugees and immigrants, visit Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service at www.lirs.org.

To read about the ELCA's policy statements about immigration, go to www.elca.org/immigration.

The ELCA is also involved in helping displaced and refugee people globally through two important ministry partners—the Lutheran World Federation (www.lutheranworld.org) and Lutheran World Relief (www.lwr.org). Check out their websites for resources and more information about their critical work.

First as a refugee in Australia and then years later as an adult immigrant to the United States, I have been deeply grateful for the people who welcomed me and accepted me. I thank God that in Christ we are all one, regardless of our nationality or background or status. As my friend Jacky used to remind me, "If someone asks you who you are, say boldly, 'I am a child of God and an heir to the Kingdom of heaven.'" And so are you! ☺

Else Schardt and her husband served as missionaries to Papua New Guinea 1965 to 1991. They live in Dubuque, Iowa. Their books, *Surprises at the Table and Mission in Motion: Walking Together with God's People in Papua New Guinea*, can be ordered through schardtsville@q.com.



LET US PRAY

Food for the Journey

by Julie K. Aageson

Leaving home, literally and metaphorically, is part of life. Life comes at us from the moment we leave the comfort and confines of our mother's womb. Wailing our way into the world, we soon discover that the journey of life will be an unfolding drama that stretches us beyond our capacity for change—challenge after challenge!

At the beginning, most of us bask in the comforts of childhood. We depend on being fed and clothed and cared for, safe in the familiar circle of family. But it isn't long before we begin pushing away, needing to explore the great world. Margaret Wise Brown's classic children's book, *The Runaway Bunny*, beautifully describes this leaving home:

Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So he said to his mother, "I am running away." "If you run away," said his mother, "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny."

Runaway bunny begins a litany: what he will become and where he will go, place after far away place to escape the long reach of his mother's arms. But at each description of becoming a fish and swimming away or becoming a rock on the mountain or a crocus in a hidden garden, his mother becomes a fisherman to catch him or a mountain climber to protect him or a gardener who will find him. If he becomes a bird and flies away, she becomes a tree he flies home to. Finally he becomes a little boy who runs into a house. His mother is there to catch him in her arms. "Shucks," he says,

"I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny."

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates Psalm 84 with these beautiful images:

What a beautiful home, God-of-the-Angel-Armies! I've always longed to live in a place like this, always dreamed of a room in your house...birds find nooks and crannies in your house, sparrows and swallows make nests there. They lay their eggs and raise their young, singing their songs in the place where we worship... how blessed all those in whom you live, whose lives become roads you travel....

In our own struggles to leave home, we need to be reminded again and again that the whole world is God's home. That there is no place too far and no road too difficult for the One who travels with us—that wherever we go, God is. No matter where we go or how far out there we may be, God is there, seen and unseen, known and unknown. "Shucks," we say, "we might just as well stay where we are and be your children!"

Food for the journey? The steadfast love of a mother for a runaway bunny. Manna and quail. A daily sunrise. Traveling companions. Our own nests and the places where we sing and where we worship. Our lives that become the roads God travels. Abundant food, everywhere we turn! ☩

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at every table

Driving from Des Moines, Iowa, to Estes Park, Colo., takes a long time, and the scenery isn't that interesting if you're only 10 years old. Taking this family road trip for our summer vacations required a lot of creativity from my parents who did a great job of keeping me entertained. Mostly that involved lots of singing.

It was in the back seat of our family's 1979 Chevette that I composed my first original tune, setting the words of our nightly table blessing to music:

Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blest. Amen.

It was a three-part round, with the "Amen" climbing and descending the steps of a major fifth.

I knew that suppertime prayer long before

by Erik Christensen

I knew the story of the Road to Emmaus, that biblical road trip during which disciples shared stories of hope and despair and discovered Christ in their midst during the breaking of the bread. Still, I think the pattern of speaking (or singing) this prayer before thousands of meals in my lifetime readied me for that story, preparing me to imagine Christ present at every table.

Discovering Christ present in bread shared with strangers isn't always such a surprise. Some settings make it almost impossible to miss, though no less transforming. That's how it was for me when I broke bread after worship in a township outside Johannesburg, South Africa, on a travel seminar during seminary.

We were invited to a Sunday morning service held in a meeting hall constructed out of corrugated tin panels over a dirt floor. The place was barely larger

than a two-car garage, but there must have been 80 or 90 people gathered for worship. And gathering in this place meant more than a prelude and an opening hymn. It meant an hour or so of singing. The sermon was equally expansive and no one was in a rush to be done. This worship was the entire day's purpose, not the preface to an afternoon filled with a personal agenda.

What's more, we were honored guests. We, who had paid great sums of money to cross the ocean and make a road trip around the nation of South Africa, were welcomed into worship and treated to a lavish luncheon by hosts who were living, in many cases, on little more than a dollar a day.

When the time came to bless the meal, the pastor of this congregation turned to me and asked me to do the blessing. I was surprised. I felt like an observer, not a participant. I'd assumed that's how they'd been viewing me as well, but I was wrong. As the food was set out on the table and we rose to give thanks for the abundance of God's blessings in our lives, I could see Christ present at this table—not in the Africans or in the Americans, but in the unity of these sisters and brothers sharing a meal.

I stretched out my hands and thanked God for the beauty of the sky, wide enough to blanket both our lands, and for the ocean waters that touched both our shores, and for the rich earth out of which God had fashioned us and provided food for our meal. I blessed God, and asked God's blessing on our table. The

people gave their *Amen* and the pastor said, “That was an *African* prayer!” My heart burned within me.

Another kind of meal

In other settings though, God’s presence at the table takes us by surprise. Perhaps it was precisely because I wasn’t sitting at a table, or that it wasn’t precisely bread, that I was surprised when Christ showed up during a trip to San Diego.

I was newly single and broken-hearted. I’d recently extracted myself from the home shared with my ex and took a road trip to live in a basement apartment with friends in Washington, D.C. I had a new job as a community organizer working with homeless youth for a national organization with offices in southern California. I was in San Diego for a week of training.

My first night there I remember sitting in a dingy hotel room, eating pizza from a box and willing myself not to call my ex. The next night I called and asked what had happened. Like the disciples heading to Emmaus, our hopes were left along the roadside.

The next day, I was scheduled to spend 24 hours on the streets with a formerly homeless young adult as my tour guide, to learn how the homeless youth lived. She took me downtown and taught me how to panhandle. She showed me how to slip into a movie theater through the back door to catch a nap in the safety of a dark room. She introduced me to her friends.

We shared stories. I heard about kids who’d been pushed out of the house when a new step-parent moved in. I heard from kids whose folks had lost their jobs and become homeless, staying together in shelters for a while, but slowly pulled apart by the very systems created to help. Suddenly my cardboard boxes full of books and basement apartment didn’t seem so bad.

Around midnight our stomachs were starting to grumble. By depending on the kindness of strangers, we’d managed to collect about seven dollars in spare change. With these meager offerings, we were able to

enter a corner store and use the bathroom before grocery shopping for our dinner.

Seven dollars bought us a bag of Doritos, a package of cheap hot dogs, and a couple packets of ramen soup. My tour guide directed me to get a cup of hot water from the instant coffee machine and meet her back out on the curb. There, she showed me the trick to making “spread”—a street-side delicacy you’ll never find in any cookbook.

First, she combined crushed chips and noodles with chunks of hot dog meat and the ramen flavor packets in the Doritos bag. Next, she slowly added steaming hot water to the mix, just enough to turn the starchy solids into a paste—not so much to make them into a stew. Finally, improvising an oven by rolling the plastic bag up in her hooded sweatshirt, she gave the ingredients about 20 minutes to set.

When dinner was ready she pulled the package out of her hoodie and tore a small hole in the bottom. Forcing the paste directly into her mouth through the rip, she showed me how to eat this meal. We passed the bag back and forth until it was empty, laughing at what a wretched, miserable supper it made.

I don’t think my heart burned within me that night, but as the warmth of that meal spread from my belly to my limbs I was grateful that I wasn’t alone. Even on the streets I had company to watch over me and see me safely through to the next day’s dawning. My heart was no less broken, but I could imagine a new life, resurrection beyond shattered hopes.

Saying grace

As a child, my parents taught me to fold my hands, bow my head, and say my prayers before each meal. *Come, Lord Jesus. Be our guest and let these gifts to us be blest.* More than a prayer, it has been for me the map for many a road trip to Emmaus and back. ☺

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HEALTH WISE

The Rules of Recalls

by Molly M. Ginty

It triggered seizures in
Isabelle Reinert, a toddler in Sauk Rapids, Minn., who ate turkey pot pie tainted with salmonella.

It paralyzed the legs of Stephanie Smith, a professional dance instructor in Minneapolis who had beef patties contaminated with E. coli.

It caused Robert Ernst of Angleton, Texas, a marathon runner and personal trainer, to suffer a fatal heart attack after he took the arthritis drug Vioxx.

Food and drug safety regulation lapses can strike their victims without warning and affect an estimated one in six Americans each year. As you work to maintain your health this summer, you may not realize that your home is harboring potentially perilous products, such as raw bean sprouts that can carry virulent bacteria and batches of Benadryl or Tylenol that were recalled in 2010 due to safety concerns.

But with recent improvements in government oversight—and with better vigilance on the part of consumers—it is possible to protect yourself and your family from the dangerous mistakes that are sometimes made by United States manufacturers and distributors.

Government standards on this front were recently heightened and honed. "Last year, Congress passed the Food Safety Modernization Act," said Sarah A. Klein, a staff attorney for the Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest. "Since then, the U.S. has been able to require for the very first time that unsafe or unscrupulous man-

facturers remove contaminated products from the marketplace."

How did this landmark legislation come about? Flash back to 1962, when birth defects caused by a miscarriage-prevention drug spurred the passage of new laws requiring manufacturers to prove their products were safe before they came to market. Regulations were further strengthened in 1982, when an unknown criminal laced bottles of Tylenol with potassium cyanide, killing seven people and leading to the creation of industry-wide, tamper-proof seals.

Further improvements continue to this day. In the past five years, produce companies have created a self-imposed tax to cover the cost of keeping greens bacteria free. Major grocery and drug-store chains have launched customer loyalty programs that issue product safety alerts. And efforts like these are being applauded by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a federal agency based in Silver Spring, Md., that oversees compliance—and offers consumer guidance—through the hundreds of food and product recalls that are still necessary each year.

How and why do recalls occur? Sometimes, they're due to contamination, such as in 2012, when cooked eggs were tainted with Listeria, a bacteria that required the recall of salads and egg-spread sandwiches in 34 states.

Problems have also been found with packaging, illustrated by two other recent cases: incorrect dosing instructions on a certain brand of birth control pills and

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative. Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

glass particles found in batches of a lung medication.

Problems can manifest quickly, as happened with a promising new hypertension drug that was yanked in 1998 when it was found to be deadly if combined with other medications. And they can unfold slowly, as happened with a 60-year-old decongestant and weight-loss drug discovered in 2000 to boost the risk of stroke. Recalls can affect a staggering number of people, such as a 2004 rollback of an arthritis drug, taken by 20 million patients. Safety scandals can be expensive (consider the \$14 billion recall of a diet drug, found in 1997 to be linked to pulmonary problems). Moreover, they can be devastating (consider the 1975 termination of a pregnancy medication linked to cancer and infertility in the daughters of mothers who used the drug).

What should you do if a product you use proves to have safety problems? Stop taking it. Call your doctor for guidance. Return the food or drug in question to the place of purchase for a refund. Or discard it safely, mixing it with coffee grounds or kitty litter and sealing it in a plastic bag before disposing it far out of reach of any children and pets in your household.

What can you do to prevent safety problems in advance?

On the food front, rinse all produce thoroughly before you eat it. Scrub utensils properly, and use separate, clean cutting boards for meat, never cutting vegetables and meat on the same board. Before and after preparing meals, wash

your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap. Always follow cooking instructions to the letter, and make sure you heat meat to 165° F, the internal temperature required to kill virulent bacteria. Immediately after you finish eating, refrigerate leftovers at 40° F or below. Better yet, freeze them—the best way to ward off contamination from bacteria found in meats, cheeses, pork, and unpasteurized milk.

When it comes to medications, ask your doctor to prescribe tried-and-true drugs instead of new alternatives that may have unknown side effects. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist before you reach for new over-the-counter drugs, too.

In the case of all types of products, monitor recalls on the government website www.fda.gov.

Also consider becoming an advocate for improved consumer safety. "We need to make sure recent legislation is sufficiently funded and strongly implemented," said Erik D. Olson, director of food programs for the Pew Health Group in Washington, D.C.

Learn about ongoing advocacy efforts at www.makeourfoodssafe.org, www.healthyschoolfoodsnow.org, and www.cspinet.org. ■■■

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The Emotional Abuser

by Kathy Haueisen



Corrie sat on a park bench thinking about her situation. The evidence that she was married to an emotional abuser had become too strong to deny. She loved Rod but recently she was coming to the realization that she fit all the criteria of an abused wife—minus the bruises or broken bones. Her marriage of 15 years consisted mostly of trying to understand why Rod became so angry. Too much of her life was focused on trying to avoid setting him off.

Though Rod never hit her, he often belittled her in front of the children. He was quick to criticize her choice of clothing, menus, time management, and many other things. He became angry and aggressive if she expressed an opinion different than his or if she wanted to do something by herself.

Corrie was confused because other times Rod was so tender, generous, and thoughtful.

She wondered if she was just being hyper-sensitive as Rod frequently told her she was. Corrie firmly believed divorce was wrong unless there was addiction, adultery, or violence. None of those applied to her situation—at least not yet.

Their fights were happening more frequently and getting more intense. She didn't know what to do. Nothing she tried seemed to work.

They'd just gotten into another argument when she told him she was going to a book club the next evening with a new friend from church. Rod told her she couldn't go. She stood her ground and said she was going. After 20 minutes of escalating tempers and voices she walked out to calm down. She walked until she got to a park a mile away. She sat down on a park bench and cried out in prayer for God to help her.

When people suspect a woman is being abused, they often ask: 1) why didn't she see this side of his personality before she married him? and 2) why doesn't she just leave?

Why didn't she see it coming?

Lutheran family therapist Stephen Blackmore explains that "During courtship men suppress their culturally ingrained need to be independent. They do all they can to convince the woman they are what she wants them to be—compassionate, romantic, trustworthy, and so forth."

Blackmore also points out that research has documented two times when the rational, thinking portion of the brain isn't operating at full capacity and we make decisions more according to our emotions. One time is when we're engaged in a romantic relationship. The other is when we're afraid. Abusive relationships include both romance and fear. The cycle of abuse consists of romance, abuse, remorse, and regret, followed by promises that things will be different.

During the romantic phase neither party thinks rationally. Both see what they want to see and are on

their best behavior. Most people can put up a good front for a while. No one can sustain it indefinitely.

Often emotionally abusive men have deep, painful fears of abandonment or appearing weak or inadequate. These fears fuel a determination to control all aspects of their lives—especially their wives and children. They can't control their anxieties so they try to control other people.

Sadly, the safer the man feels with the woman, the less he feels obligated to monitor his behavior around her. The flip side of this is that women are typically pre-conditioned to be nurturers. When confronted with an angry, unhappy husband, her first instinct is to try to soothe him. This pattern is reinforced by the church when we're told to forgive "seven times seventy" and to turn the other cheek.

While we are expected to forgive one another, tolerating abusive behavior is not part of forgiveness. In their book, *Don't Forgive Too Soon*, authors Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn write about the two hands of forgiveness. One hand insists that the inappropriate behavior stop. The other hand forgives and invites the aggressor to turn and repent. Sometimes the abused one needs to leave so as not to be available for further abuse. The situation has to quit getting worse before it can start getting better.

The emotional wounds underlying abusive behavior may go back to early childhood. A man may convince himself he's over any childhood losses. In his mind, his only problem is a wife who isn't doing what he wants. Blackmore points out we don't encourage men to acknowledge hurt or feelings of weakness. During the courtship there are rarely any sign of abusive behavior or attitude, which is why the woman didn't see it. The control and abuse escalate gradually over time until one day a woman realizes she is trapped. In some cases, she has allowed herself to be financially dependent on him. She may have let her friendships lapse. He may have cut her off from her family.

By the time the abuse cycle is well established she

may be feeling deep shame about her situation, anxiety about the future, and grief over the loss of the marriage she thought she'd have.

Why doesn't she just leave?

Imagine a fire is roaring toward your home. You have 20 minutes to grab whatever you can and leave, knowing you can never return. How well do you think you'd organize your thoughts in such a situation? An abused woman lives with chronic stress. Stress compromises her ability to think clearly and make good choices.

Women don't leave for a variety of personal and culturally reinforced reasons...

- > If she has children and doesn't know how she'll provide for them.
- > She can't afford to leave. How will she cover all the other expenses of living on her own?
- > Fear of being judged by others.
- > She may have been taught that divorce is not an option no matter how bad it gets.
- > Since abusive marriages also can include some good days, she may keep hoping it'll get better. Then she won't have to give up the companionship, the home she's worked hard to create, and the economic security.
- > She still loves her husband.
- > She fears a divorce will result in expensive battles with attorneys. This is not unrealistic. The court system is an adversarial one in which the two parties are pitted against each other.

Biblical passages about marriage and divorce may have convinced her it's wrong to leave a marriage, especially when there's been no addiction, physical abuse, or adultery. It's hard for her to consider the emotional abuse as a serious problem.

What Does the Bible Say?

Many women stay in abusive situations because of their

interpretation of Scripture. Let's look at some verses.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord....Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy (Ephesians 5:22 and 25).

Often verse 22 has been interpreted to mean a husband can demand anything he likes and the wife has to comply. But a better interpretation is that wives are to submit *as to the Lord*—as to one who has proven to be trustworthy and have her best interest in mind. Husbands are to care about their wives the way they care about their own well-being.

Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you, that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery' (Matthew 19:8–9).

Divorce wasn't part of God's hopes for marriage, but Jesus acknowledges it's a reality.

When a marriage becomes more life-taking than life-giving, the marriage is terminally ill. God is about restoring life.

The church has too often used Scripture to encourage people to stay in bad situations. But the Lord of grace and mercy is about restoring people to a place of peace, hope, and security.

How you can help someone in an abusive marriage:

- > Bring up the subject gently and let her know you won't be shocked to learn all is not wonderful in her marriage. You can say, "Sometimes he doesn't seem to show you much respect. He must be difficult to live with. If you ever want to talk about it, I'm here for you."
- > If she asks, help her plan what she'll need to have in place before she confronts her husband or tries to leave.

- > Offer to line up professionals who can help: a professional counselor, an attorney, a pastor, or women's support group.
- > Invite her to do relaxing activities such as shopping, watching a movie, or going for a walk. Offer the gift of listening.
- > Offer practical help such as the use of a phone where calls don't show up on her phone bill or a safe place to stash cash. Perhaps you can help with childcare as she goes to appointments.
- > Don't push. Deciding to end a marriage is a major, emotionally draining event.
- > Let her know you'll be praying for her, and then do that.

Emotional abuse leaves a woman feeling frightened, confused, and ashamed. These emotions prevent her from being the confident, compassionate, creative woman she was meant to be. The church can be a safe place to process her situation, encourage healthy decisions, and offer support on the journey from emotional abuse to a future with hope. 

Kathy Haueisen is director of the ELCA's stewardship key leader program. She also writes for other religious publications. Her two grown daughters have blessed her with six grandchildren.

RESOURCES

If you are worried that you are in an emotionally abusive relationship or if you worry that the relationship may become violent, you need to seek assistance. If you are comfortable with your pastor, contact him or her and ask for advice and referrals. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 800/799-SAFE (3224) and its website is www.thehotline.org. There you can find more information and resources.

SIGNS OF AN EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

The first indicators of an abusive situation are so subtle that it can be hard to distinguish them from the normal give-and-take of merging two lives. Some warning signs that you might be living with an emotional abuser if:

- > He wants to control what you wear and who you spend time with.
- > He may not want you to work outside the home.
- > He wants to do little things for you that you are capable of doing for yourself. This is different than courtesy—it's more like taking over and making sure you do it the "right way."
- > He suggests your plans for vacation or the weekend activities aren't as good as his. The only good plans are the ones he makes.
- > He becomes irritable and unreasonably demanding if you go out without him. He may become jealous and accuse you of having an affair. He tells you that you don't need time with your friends or family because you have him. He tries to isolate you.
- > He may be overly generous buying things for you but then tries to talk you out of buying little thing you need.
- > He finds fault with little things such as the way you prepare food, arrange furniture, do the laundry, raise the children, etc.
- > He calls you names or insults you.
- > He threatens you or your children or your pets.
- > He reminds you frequently how much he does for you and how well off you are with him.
- > He punishes you by withholding affection.
- > He controls all the finances. You may have access to credit cards and bank accounts, but he reviews your use of them and controls your spending decisions.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

by Kate Gaskill

Empowering women in rural areas and lifting up the role they can play in wiping out hunger and poverty was highlighted at the 56th annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

"It is my conviction that we—the community, the people—we are the ones who can make changes that are necessary," said 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee in opening remarks at the event held at the United Nations headquarters in New York City in late February.

"Those in grassroots, rural communities have the answers to the issues," said Leymah, a Lutheran woman from Liberia. She is a peace activist and author of *Mighty Be Our Powers*. Leymah spoke at the 2011 Women of the ELCA triennial gathering just months before she received the peace prize for her peace-building work in Liberia.

About 2,000 participants attended the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Among them were Lutheran women from ELCA congregations, Women of the ELCA, global companion synods, and staff from the ELCA offices in Chicago and Washington and Lutheran World Relief.

On the first day of the event, the Lutheran World Federation

and the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations (one of the advocacy ministries of the ELCA) sponsored a forum, "From Potential Impoverishment to Seeds of Sustainability." It offered a platform for Lutheran women to address the challenges facing rural women throughout the world. The panel included Lutheran women working in South and North Dakota, Brazil, and Cameroon.

SEEDS OF HOPE

Irma Rodriguez-León, vice president of the ELCA Latino Ministry Association and a member of First Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, was on the panel because of her role as a human rights activist. A lawyer and university professor specializing in human rights and international law, Irma had worked in her native country of Colombia advancing rights of rural women.

"I worked with the support of the LWF and the ELCA to help women who were displaced, who had lost their land, and who had suffered vio-

lence," she shared. "I worked to help them find refuge because many of them were in danger, and eventually I was threatened myself."

Irma was a human rights worker in Colombia at a time when no one was allowed to speak about these issues. This made her a target. In 2003, paramilitary forces gave Irma eight days to leave her homeland.

The United States granted Irma asylum and she now works with rural women and families in South Dakota through Pueblo De Dios, an ecumenical ministry helping women learn English and computer skills—and giving them hope.

Daniele Schmidt Peter of Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) echoed Irma's hope for progress and equality. Daniele and her five siblings grew up helping their parents on their small family farm. Since 1996, her family has worked with an organization created by her church—Support Center for Small Farmers ("CAPA" in Portuguese), which assists small farmers in development, equality under the law, and agro-ecology practices, including crop diversity. She now works for CAPA, assisting projects specially connected to women.

"What gives me hope is to see what is happening in our communities," Daniele said. "This agriculture stresses sustainability of the land

and is based on inclusion of all members of the family. There is not sustainable agriculture without the full inclusion of women; these women who worked the land are now key players in the development and management of cooperatives and the sale of products."

A PATH TO NEW DREAMS

Another member of the panel stressed the importance of education for rural women. Jessica Arneson, co-chair of the ELCA Eastern North Dakota Synod Hunger and Justice Committee, shared how the lack of higher education discouraged her from the career path she'd dreamed of pursuing. "I've always had a passion to help people, to focus on underlying issues of poverty and hunger, but I never felt very confident about myself," she said. "While I dreamed of going to college and making a difference, there was a voice in my head saying, 'You can't do that! You're not smart enough!'"

Jessica focused her efforts on involvement in her small North Dakota community. "I was a Girl Scout leader and a 4-H leader, I worked so hard to be a good mother, and I was very involved in my church, but I knew there were people all over the world who were praying for God's help, praying for a voice, and praying for people to understand their troubles. I didn't want to be idle in that, but I didn't

know what to do because I thought 'who am I?'"

Jessica's life changed during her congregation's women's retreat when a pastor asked the group: If you could put reality aside, what would you be doing with your life? Jessica knew the answer immediately: She would be a missionary. But she quickly dismissed that possibility because of her family.

The pastor then asked what steps each woman could take this year to make her dream a reality. "I realized I would have to redefine what it means to be a missionary—I would have to do what I can where I am. But I also realized I would need more education," she said. "I would need to go back to school so I could truly understand the social issues I care about."

With the support of her husband and women in her church, Jessica completed a degree in social work and works to address the root causes of hunger and poverty. She is running for the State House of Representatives in North Dakota, where she hopes to affect public policy.

MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD

Jeanette Ada Maina, a leader in the Christian Association of Women for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, also believes in the positive effects of education for rural women. Jeanette is earning her doctorate in theology and she

encourages young rural women to continue their own studies. "They want to abandon school because of the lack of financial help," she said. "And their parents are more likely to agree because they are girls."

Jeanette, who will soon be among the first women ordained in her church, sponsors the education of three girls. "The hope of all rural development is based on women.... These women care for many lives. The products from their farms feed not only their own families, but ours also. We owe it to them to make their voices heard," she urged.

In closing the event, Irma pressed the importance of advocacy in improving the lives of rural women. "It is necessary that we go to our governments and sensitize them to the needs of our communities," she said. "Throughout the world, children are saying, 'Please, we want education!' And the elders are saying, 'No, don't take away our pensions—don't rob of us that! We are fighting for the future we will leave to our children and grandchildren.'"

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To learn more about the advocacy ministries of the ELCA, visit www.elca.org/advocacy. Sign up for key action alerts and find resources for your congregation.



6 lessons I LEARNED ON THE ROAD

by Christa von Zychlin

Abraham and Sarai, for example, moved from Haran to Canaan, and may well have had more than one quarrel along the way. What did Sarai really think of Abraham's brilliant idea to pass her off as his sister?

The Israelites moved from Egypt, all around the wilderness and on to the Promised Land, but not before years of grumbling about the food, the accommodations, and their leaders. Especially their leaders.

Jesus was born while his parents were on a road trip to Bethlehem. While he was still very young the Holy Family traveled as refugees to Egypt. The only biblical story that has been preserved of Jesus' childhood has to do with a family trip to Jerusalem—a trip in which family relationships were greatly strained before being wonderfully clarified when he was found in the Temple.

As an adult, Jesus seems to be continually on the move, traveling with his disciples to the cosmic showdown in Jerusalem. The disciples respond to the

In many ways, the great stories of God's people are the stories of family road trips—trips that are not (a-hem) perfectly harmonious, but have a powerful effect on shaping a family.

astounding event of Jesus' resurrection by traveling all around the Middle East and beyond, spreading the news of a Savior for the whole world.

Apostle Paul is remembered for his missionary journeys, which were fraught with the hardships of travel: vehicle breakdowns (for him, shipwrecks), finding accommodations, getting arrested by local authorities, and misunderstandings (see Acts 14:8–16).

The journeys recorded in Scripture are complicated and dangerous, but also punctuated with forgiveness, camaraderie, and joy-filled surprise. The biblical family road trips are the stories that give shape to our lives as Christians today.

Which leads me to wonder: Are there ways in which our personal family journeys and road trips relate to the journeys of our local church congregations? Dare we say that road trips not only shape our families, but help us to understand our church family, too?

One

The one and only family trip I remember as a kid was the trip around the Great Lakes. Five lakes, eight states, 10 days. My dad came up with this idea. To my 5-year-old mind it was a great idea. My older sister and brother thought it was a great idea. My mom? My mom knew exactly what kind of an idea this was.

Nearly a half century later, I clearly recognize what I did not see at the time. Ten days in a vehicle with kids and no air-conditioning is not a great idea. But I'll give my mom all the credit for **Family Road Trip Lesson #1: Sometimes, when someone you love has a "great" idea, you just go along with it.** And this first lesson has a corollary: **Corollary #1: Crazy ideas can result in warm memories many years later.**

It's true for families, and it can be true for churches. Fifteen years ago a very young, inexperienced, part-time youth director at my church took a group of eight teenagers on a mission trip to India. India! What a great idea!

After spending a year fund-raising and educating the congregation about the children's home they would visit, and the playground equipment they would help install, they at last set off on this voyage halfway around the world. A majority of the teenagers and all of the adults got quite sick (nothing serious, but highly unpleasant) and I don't think this travel feat was ever repeated at that church. But I also know it changed lives in India and in my congregation.

Each of the young voyagers will remember encountering God's children in India for the rest of their lives, and hopefully the Indian children will remember these American teenagers who came to receive and share the love of Jesus. Sometimes, when someone you love has a "great" idea at church, you just go along with it.

two

Back to my Great Lakes Trip—after months of planning, we were off. I was hauled into the VW bus in my pajamas before dawn every morning as my parents hoped to get a good part of each day's driving done before we three kids were awake enough to start asking, "Are we there yet?"

During those early hours I, the youngest of the family, slept confidently and fearlessly, in the back seat. Fifty years later the impact of this mode of travel is still with me. My husband calls this the "just put me in the back seat of the VW" syndrome. When it comes to family travel, I like having other people (this now means my husband) do the work of planning. And mapping. And driving.

For my part, I like sleeping in and being awakened just in time for breakfast, or in time to see the sights. And I rarely complain about the itinerary.

Family Road Trip Lesson #2: Some members of our families (as in our churches) are just along for the ride. And that's okay. For whatever reason, whether it's because of youth, age, infirmity, interest level, or busyness with other things, not everybody needs or wants to have part in the organizing of worship services, mission trips, stewardship drives, music groups or spiritual visioning events.

Some people don't want to or need to attend planning meetings or even fill out a survey sheet. They just trust the leadership of the church to shape a plan, make decisions, and then include them when it comes time for the actual event. In turn, however, we must all remember **Corollary #2: Those of us in the "just put me in the back seat and let me sleep" mode should not complain about the direction being taken, nor by the amount of time it takes to get to the destination.**

three

As we traveled around the lakes, my parents woke us kids up around breakfast time. At home, we ate cold cereal for breakfast. Never did we eat sausages, pancakes and syrup, or giant muffins in the mornings at home, although we had *heard* of these delicacies from neighbors and TV.

During the Great Lakes Trip, however, I was introduced to these delights at roadside diners. I remember sticky vinyl seats, the smell of coffee and the smile on my dad's face when he asked for that second free cup. I remember my brother and sister horsing around, and I remember deep satisfaction around the Formica tabletops.

Family Road Trip Lesson #3: Take time for meals. Splurge a little. One of my favorite church programs over the years has been a marriage course that features seven weeks of candlelit meals for couples. I suspect that a large part of the consistent attendance of that program is that couples know a special meal awaits them each week.

A friend of mine who runs a highly successful and long-standing men's Bible study acknowledges that the warm homemade rolls he serves are at least as big a draw as his Bible exposition. And it seems to me that attendance at our Wednesday night confirmation program was always a little better when it was Mrs. G's turn to cook. Yes, we all need bread for the journey, whether it's homemade or gourmet or just something as special and different as pancakes and syrup, and so, **Corollary #3 is: Good food keeps grumbling down and spirits way up.**

four

About three o'clock in the afternoon, our family would look for a motel. This was fun too, at least for us kids. My parents were working-class immigrants, and we lived in a very modest home. So we did not go to hotels, but motels. Bathroom floor mats made of paper were a fun novelty for us, not a sign of cheapness.

The motels that had pools and vending machines—wow, this was the life! We kids soon discovered buckets of free ice can be loads of fun for playing catch and tag.

Family Road Trip Lesson #4: Include the children and allow them to play. Although I don't remember my parents ever specifically teaching us the names of the Great Lakes, nor the names of the states we went through, I'm convinced that our trip around the Great Lakes gave me a serious edge in grade-school social studies classes. Those Great Lakes had positive associations and I later found myself enthusiastically learning about other aspects of the lakes, such as their bio-diversity and ecology. This is an interest I still enjoy today, since my home is located within a 10-minute walk from one of those lakes! **Corollary #4: Children are continually learning on multiple levels.**

Jesus tells us whoever welcomes a little child, welcomes him. Our children come to church expectant, hopeful, and ready for a bit of an adventure. Yes, they do things that are inappropriate, like try out their rollerblades in the parish kitchen or check out how loud the change can clink into the offering plate, or how it sounds to sing a hymn in falsetto. Meanwhile, however, they are also soaking up God's word, the rhythms of music and prayer, and the warm community of not-so-like minded people who still manage to come together to honor the God of our salvation. We can only hope they create homes that reflect the journey of their childhood churches.

five

All was well for the first few days of the Great Lakes trip and then we were struck by disaster with a D: diarrhea. Specifically, it struck *me*. Our pleasant every-two-hour breaks became every-half-hour emergencies. I had the chance to inspect lots of gas station bathrooms and learned to say, "May I use the bathroom, please?" with such urgency that the normally reluctant gas station attendant was quick to hand over the key.

That afternoon we found a motel a bit earlier than usual. I gratefully headed for the bathroom and did my still urgent business, only to discover—to the horror of our entire family—that the toilet would not flush.

And here's the amazing part—nobody complained. I received only kindness. Dad went to fetch a plunger. Mom fed me flat 7-Up, rice, and crackers (our family remedy for all digestive ailments). The toilet was fixed, my stomach seemed better, and when my mom said I really shouldn't have any of those fresh roadside-stand cherries (my favorite), my big brother (not normally the most compassionate member of the family) snuck me some anyway. They were delicious.

Family Road Trip Lesson # 5: People get sick on trips.

This is an invitation to compassion. Jesus lived a life of compassion for the sick and this is an area in which most churches really do excel, as we reach out with prayers, prayer shawls, hot dishes, visits, and unexpected gifts for those who fall ill along the way. It's part of what makes us a church family. **Corollary #5: Watch for acts of compassion to emerge from unexpected places.**

six

My dad's goal on our Great Lakes trip was to drive around all five of America's Great Lakes, and thanks to my parents' driving and navigational skills, we did it. The goal for us kids was to swim in each of the Great Lakes, but we found out just how cold Lake Superior can be, even in the summer. Our new goal was to dip our toes into every lake, and dip we did. **Family Road Trip Lesson # 6: Set goals.** Get out the maps and guidebooks. Use your skills. And go.

One of Martin Luther's most famous sayings is, "Sin boldly! But believe more boldly still." In other words, no trip of any kind is ever going to be perfect in this life. But, we believe in a God of forgiveness, camaraderie, and joy-filled surprise. Therefore we needn't fear setting out on a trip of any kind. Which leads to the final **Corollary #6: Whether on family road trips, church expeditions, or life journeys, know that you go with God.** So go! 

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BIBLE STUDY ALONG THE WAY SESSION 2

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

by Julie A. Kanarr



Materials you will need

- Postcards (or blank 3x4 or 4x6 index cards)
- Optional: paper and colored pencils/pens/markers for faith/life map activity
- Bible
- *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW)

Theme Verse

"Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." (1 Kings 19:7b)

Road Map

In this session, we will walk first with the Israelites and then with the prophet Elijah on their respective wilderness journeys. Hungry and complaining, the Israelites are fed by God as they travel from Egypt toward Mt. Sinai. Elijah, exhausted after his escape from Queen Jezebel's wrath, takes refuge in the wilderness. Like the Israelites before him, Elijah also is a weary traveler who is fed by God and strengthened for his journey to God's holy mountain. We will explore both Elijah's and the Isra-

elites' paths of discouragement and their experiences of God's providing for them. Along the way, we will look for the intersections between their journeys and our own paths of faith.

Preparing the Way

Sing "Will You Come and Follow Me" (ELW 798).

Reflect on a time when you have become restless during a journey. Perhaps you were wondering "are we there yet?" Perhaps you were tired and hungry and wanted to rest, or even quit. What fed you so you could continue? How did you cope with the frustrations, irritations, and challenges of traveling? (See "Six Lessons I Learned on the Road," p. 26.)

Are We There Yet?

READ EXODUS 16:1–12.

The writer of Exodus looks at the Israelites' time in the wilderness as a time of theological and spiritual formation. Their escape from slavery becomes a pilgrimage to Mt. Sinai, God's holy mountain, where the commandments they receive flow out of the divine announcement, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:1).

The hardships the Israelites face become opportunities for reflection on what it means to live as God's people, especially in difficult times. Each episode in their journey becomes an invitation to renewed trust in God's promise of redemption, protection, and provision. There is a recurring pattern: The Israelites complain, and God responds. God always remembers and keeps God's promises.

After being delivered from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites step out into the wilderness. Though they had worked under oppressive conditions, their life along the Nile River meant that they had not lacked for food or water. Now they face the hardships that accompany their freedom. Hungry and thirsty, they are wearied by their travels. Pleasant oases, such as they found at Elim with its abundant water and shade (Exodus 15:27), are few and far between.

As their discomfort level rises, they lash out against their leaders, blaming Moses and Aaron for their situation. The Israelites look back at their life in Egypt through the rear-view mirror of nostalgia. In the receding distance, their past looks more attractive than their present. With the long stretch of desert in front of them, they can only imagine their future as bleak. They would rather trade the unfamiliar challenges of the wilderness for the comforts of home, forgetting that those comforts had been far outweighed by their brutal oppression (Exodus 1:8–2:25).

Moses and Aaron recognize that although they

are the targets of the Israelites' anger, the Israelites' complaints are actually against God. In responding to their complaint, God announces both a test (16:4) and a promise (16:6). Their hunger raises a spiritual issue: God will faithfully provide food for them. Will the Israelites respond with obedience? Though the Israelites repeatedly fail that test, God steadfastly provides for their needs, with the gift of meat in the evening and manna in the morning. God's provision for their daily needs is coupled with God's relentless yearning that they be faithful, and "know that I am the Lord your God" (v. 12).

REST STOP

1. What issues do the Israelites struggle with during their wilderness journey?
2. Where are the points in your life or faith journey where you find it difficult to trust?

Give Us Today Our Daily Bread

READ EXODUS 16:13–36.

Against the backdrop of the wilderness and its hardships, God's daily provision of manna offers the Israelites a lesson in trusting God and discovering what constitutes "enough." In God's wilderness economy, there is no scarcity, no surplus, and no room for greed. Those who gather a lot and those who gather a little all find that they have enough, but no more. Those who try to store up their manna for the next day discover that the excess rots. They learn that hoarding stinks, literally.

The practice of Sabbath rest is woven into this story. On the sixth day, the Israelites are instructed to gather enough manna to last for two days, and assured that it will not rot. The absence of manna on the Sabbath underscores the lesson that God is the source of their daily bread. Those who go out to gather manna on the Sabbath anyway discover that God is faithful to the promise of what God will and will not do. They

look around, but there is no manna on the Sabbath. On this wilderness journey, the gift of Sabbath rest is not optional.

The Israelites are instructed to gather one jar of manna to carry with them, as a reminder of their journey. More than just a souvenir keepsake from their trip, this jar is to be a tangible reminder of God's care for them and of what they have learned during their time in the wilderness.

Despite their complaints and repeated failures to obey God's commands, God remains faithful to God's promises. God sustains the weary travelers with the rhythm of daily food and weekly rest. Thus strengthened, they journey through the wilderness on their way to Mt. Sinai, and then to the Promised Land.

REST STOP

3. What lessons do the Israelites learn from the gift of manna?
4. Where are the intersections between the Israelites' experience in the wilderness and your own life and faith?

Write a post card from the wilderness, noting your thoughts, feelings, questions, and reflections about this place and your journey through it. You may wish to write from the stance of the Israelites, or of Moses, or from your own perspective of being with them on their journey.

Food for the Journey

READ 1 KINGS 19:1-10.

The prophet Elijah's journey into the wilderness comes after his protracted conflict with Ahab, the king of Israel. Elijah was outspoken in proclaiming God's judgment against Ahab for his unfaithfulness to God. One of the recurring issues throughout the time of ancient Israel's history was that of religious syncretism (the merging or combining of different beliefs). Given that their Canaanite neighbors were polytheistic, it was difficult for the Israelites to maintain the practice

of monotheism with exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Despite the commandment "you shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3) Ahab had built a temple for Baal, the Canaanite fertility god associated with rainfall and creation's rebirth, and a shrine to Ash-toreth, a Canaanite goddess. Ahab had also married Jezebel (the daughter of a neighboring king), who practiced the Canaanite religion with its worship of Baal.

Elijah (whose name means "my God is Yahweh") arranged a public contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The deity who sent fire down from heaven to kindle the sacrificial offering would be acclaimed as a true God. Elijah wins with an impressive demonstration of God's power, and has the priests of Baal seized and put to death as false prophets (1 Kings 18:20-40).

When she hears that Elijah had defeated and killed the 450 prophets of Baal, Jezebel is angry and seeks vengeance against Elijah. Elijah flees into the wilderness, sits down under a broom tree (a large desert shrub) and sinks into despair. Despite all of his successes, he feels like a failure, persecuted and alone. Physically spent and emotionally exhausted, Elijah is at the point of collapse. He lies down for a nap. Elijah wants to die.

God's response to Elijah's prayer does not grant his death wish. As God had once fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, now God provides food and water to nourish Elijah, to strengthen him for his upcoming journey. Twice, Elijah is awakened by an angel who urges him to get up and eat.

In a journey reminiscent of the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness, what had become as an escape from danger becomes a pilgrimage to God's holy mountain. Elijah travels 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb, another name for Mt. Sinai. There he takes refuge in a cave. God asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God listens as Elijah pours out his story, lamenting Israel's unfaithfulness and his own plight. Elijah

laments that he is the only faithful one left, and that his life is in danger.

REST STOP

5. What is Elijah's experience like on his journey into the wilderness? In what ways is it similar to that of the Israelites?
6. Where are the intersections between Elijah's path and your journey of life and faith? Have you ever had similar highs and lows?

Elijah Encounters God

READ 1 KINGS 19:11–18.

Elijah stands on the mountain at God's direction. He experiences a series of dramatic signs commonly associated with divine power: an earthquake, wind, and fire. God, however, is not found among them, even though God's mighty rush of fire from heaven that had consumed the offering during the showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:38). Instead, God is found within the sound of "sheer silence" (sometimes also translated as "still, small voice.") God's absence from the expected places opens Elijah, and us, to receive God where we do not expect God to be. (See "At Every Table," p. 16.)

God repeats the question "What are you doing here?" Again, Elijah pours out his story of faithfulness, and weariness. God listens, but does not let Elijah remain stuck in his place of despair. God sends Elijah back out of the wilderness with a specific action plan, telling Elijah where to go and what to do next. God assures Elijah that he is not alone, because there are still many others, 7,000 in all, who continue to be faithful.

REST STOP

7. In what ways does Elijah's meeting with God strengthen him and renew him in his faith and mission?
8. Have you had times when you felt God strengthened and renewed you and your faith? Can you share some examples?

Write a postcard from Mt. Horeb, noting your thoughts and reflections. You may wish to write from Elijah's perspective.

Optional: Further Exploration

Continue to work on the map of your faith and life you began in during Session 1. You may wish to focus on the spiritual "landscape" that you have traveled through (for example, wilderness, mountaintops, places of rest, and refuge). You may wish to create landmarks representing times and places of questions and doubts, complaints, and reassurance.

Closing

Gather your postcards. Re-read them and share them with your group if you desire.

After a time for silence, pray together:

O God, full of compassion, we commit and commend ourselves to you, in whom we live and move and have our being. Be the goal of our pilgrimage and our rest along the way. Give us refuge from the turmoil of worldly distractions beneath the shadow of your wings. Let our hearts, so often a sea of restless waves, find peace in you, O God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*ELW*, page 86)

Looking ahead

In session 3, we will travel with those who encountered Jesus along the way. We will join in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well and walk with the disciples who met the risen Christ along the road to Emmaus. We will reflect on how we experience Christ with us in our own journey of faith. ■■■

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LEADER GUIDE ALONG THE WAY SESSION 2

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

by Julie A. Kanarr



Road Map

While the three sessions of this study share the common theme of a journey, each session stands on its own as an independent unit. There are two questions at the end of each section. The first is intended to guide participants in reflecting on the meaning of the text, and the second invites participants to reflect on their own life and faith journey in light of the text.

While this leader guide provides some suggested responses, there are no right or wrong answers. The responses in the leader guide may serve to jump-start stalled conversations among participants or open up new avenues for reflection. For a more detailed introduction to the study, see the leader guide for session 1 in the June issue or at gathermagazine.org.

Are We There Yet?

1. The Israelites had forgotten the oppression they had experienced as slaves. Their nostalgia skews their vision (like looking through a curved rear-view mirror, where “objects may be closer than they appear.”) The past looks better and their

present situation seems worse. Having forgotten what God has done for them in the past, they are unable to trust that God will care for them in the present, and into the future.

2. Participants may reflect on their faith journey, their personal lives, or relationships with family, friends, co-workers, or others. Some may find it difficult to trust when past promises have been broken. Others may find it difficult to trust when the one making the promise is someone they have little previous experience with. Some may have more difficulty trusting when the promise seems to be “too big” or too good to be true.

Give Us Today our Daily Bread

3. No matter how much manna is gathered, everyone has the same amount, an *omer* (a measure of approximately one to two liters, the size of a large bottle of soda). Those who try to store up their manna for the next day are doing so in direct disobedience to God’s command and in flagrant lack of trust in God’s will and/or ability to keep promises. The absence of manna to gather on the Sabbath underscores its nature as a divine gift.

4. Participants may relate to one or more of the themes in Israel's wilderness journey. Some may reflect on their experiences of complaining, fear, weariness, or uncertainty. Others may describe a time when God has provided for their needs. Some may talk about what keeping the Sabbath might mean in the context of their own lives. Others may wrestle with what it means to have enough in a world where both scarcity and greed are a reality. The experiences of the Israelites help us to recognize that there is room in our faith walk for times of doubt, despair, frustration, questions, and difficulty.

Food for the Journey

5. Participants may see a variety of connections between these two stories. The Israelites were escaping from oppressive slavery; Elijah was escaping from a threat to his life. The Israelites complained. Elijah despaired. The Israelites spent 40 years in the desert; Elijah, 40 days. Both journeyed to the same mountain. Both were fed by God, and strengthened for their journey ahead.

6. Some participants may identify with Elijah's weariness. Some may describe times when they have felt fear or despair, or simply wanted to give up. Some may share his experience of success turning to failure. Some might identify with Elijah's experience of being threatened for speaking the truth. Others may identify with his feeling of being alone and that others are against him. Some may yearn for a chance to take a nap in the shade. Some participants may describe how God has strengthened them, fed them, and encouraged them so that they can continue on. Some participants may reflect on the connections between God's invitation to "get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you" and what it means for them to receive Holy Communion.

Elijah Encounters God

7. God summons Elijah out of the cave and tells him to stand on the mountain. God doesn't let Elijah hide or leave him to wallow in his despair forever. (Participants may note that God did not leave Elijah alone and despondent under the broom tree either.)

God's presence in the sound of sheer silence brings reassurance to Elijah that God is present in unexpected places. Twice, God asks "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God listens with patience and compassion as Elijah tells his story. The very act of telling one's story can sharpen one's sense of understanding and bring a renewed sense of purpose. God responds to Elijah's lament and corrects Elijah's misperception that he is the only faithful one left. The mission plan that God lays out for Elijah is a plan for his prophetic successors, which assures Elijah that his life and work are not in vain.

8. Participants may consider how God meets them in surprising, unexpected ways. Elijah experienced God in the "sound of sheer silence." Some may reflect on how they encounter God in quiet places. As God was not in the dramatic events of the earthquake, wind, or fire, some participants may also be keenly aware of places where they feel God's absence. Some may describe how they recognize God listening to them in prayer. Some may consider how the act of responding to God's question "what are you doing here?" can lead to a greater sense of clarity and renewal of purpose and mission. (You may want to look at Women of the ELCA's free, online resource "Sacred Spaces." Download it at www.womenoftheelca.org/.)

Optional: Further Exploration

Provide paper and writing/drawing materials for participants to map their journey of life and faith. Some may desire to continue to work on the map they began in the previous session. Some may wish to create a new map (such as topographic, showing mountains and valleys, rivers and roads).

Invite participants to reflect on the spiritual geography of their lives, including times of difficulty and joy. Encourage participants to be attentive to times when they have experienced wildernesses and places where they have encountered God. 

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As communities of faith we gather for renewal, for inspiration, and to share stories that remind us who we are. We are gathered to be empowered and to be sent as God's witnesses. Join us as we gather to explore some of these many ways that we are "Gathered by God."

THEME VERSE “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:20

September Gatherings

Throughout the Bible we read about God's gathering work and presence in this world. What does this work and presence mean to us today?

Session 1: Our Present, Christ's Presence

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:20

October Gathered to Learn

Crowds gathered around Jesus to learn from his parables. We too gather around him to listen and learn.

Session 2: Learning the Tough Stuff

“Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.” Mark 4:1

November Gathered for Life

We are gathered to be fed, just as the 5,000 were. And like them, we receive more than enough—abundant grace.

Session 3: Nothing Lost

“Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’” John 6:11–12

December Gathered and Empowered

In Acts, the apostles gather and the Holy Spirit comes down and gives them the power to speak the word of God. Can this still happen in the church today?

Session 4: Shake It Up

“When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:31

Jan/Feb 2013 Gathered for Rest and Community

Sometimes Jesus invites us to come away and rest. Sometimes it's the community that sustains us.

Session 5: Getting Away

“The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’” Mark 6:30–31

Session 6: Koinonia Calling

“God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:9

March Gathered for Shelter

Have you experienced the shelter of God's wings? How can the church offer shelter to those who are vulnerable or in need?

Session 7: Beneath Her Wings

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Luke 13:34

April Gathered to Share the Story

An important part of living out our faith is sharing it with others. How do we learn to tell the story?

Session 8: Storytelling

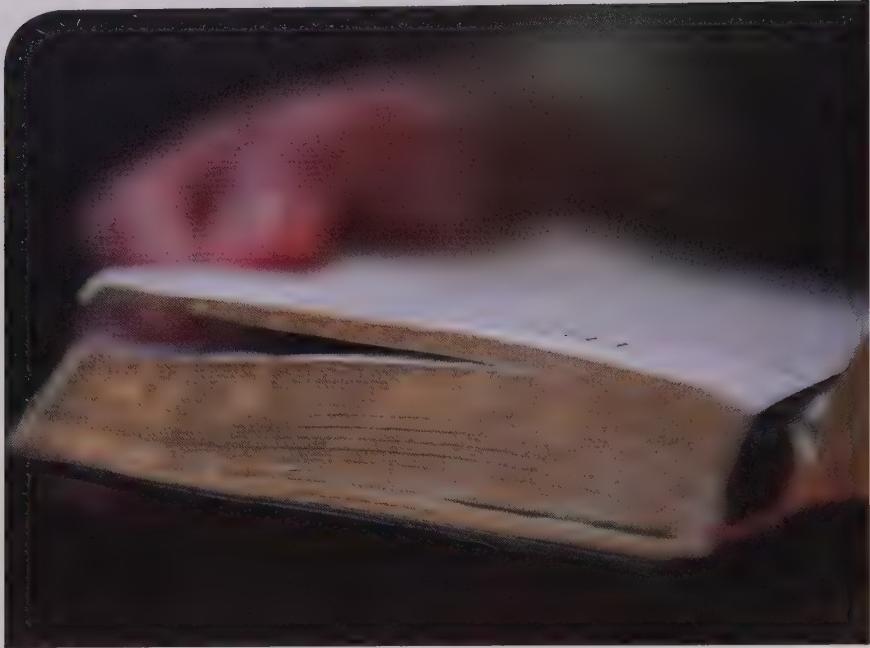
“When they arrived, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles.” Acts 14:27

May Gathered to be Sent

By virtue of our baptism, we are claimed, gathered, and sent—for the sake of the world.

Session 9: Time to Go

“So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’” Acts 1:6



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Audrey West holds a Ph.D. in New Testament from Duke University as well as M.Div. and S.T.M. degrees from Yale Divinity School. She has served on the tenured faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and, more recently, as a visiting professor at Yale Divinity School and in the Luther Seminary Doctor of Ministry program in biblical preaching. Audrey is the author of the 2004–05 award-winning Bible study, *Everyday Surprises: The Parables of Jesus*, published in *Lutheran Woman Today* (now *Gather* magazine). A California native, Audrey now lives with her spouse and several four-legged critters in Bethlehem, Pa., where she gives thanks to God daily for the discovery that dark chocolate is good for the heart.

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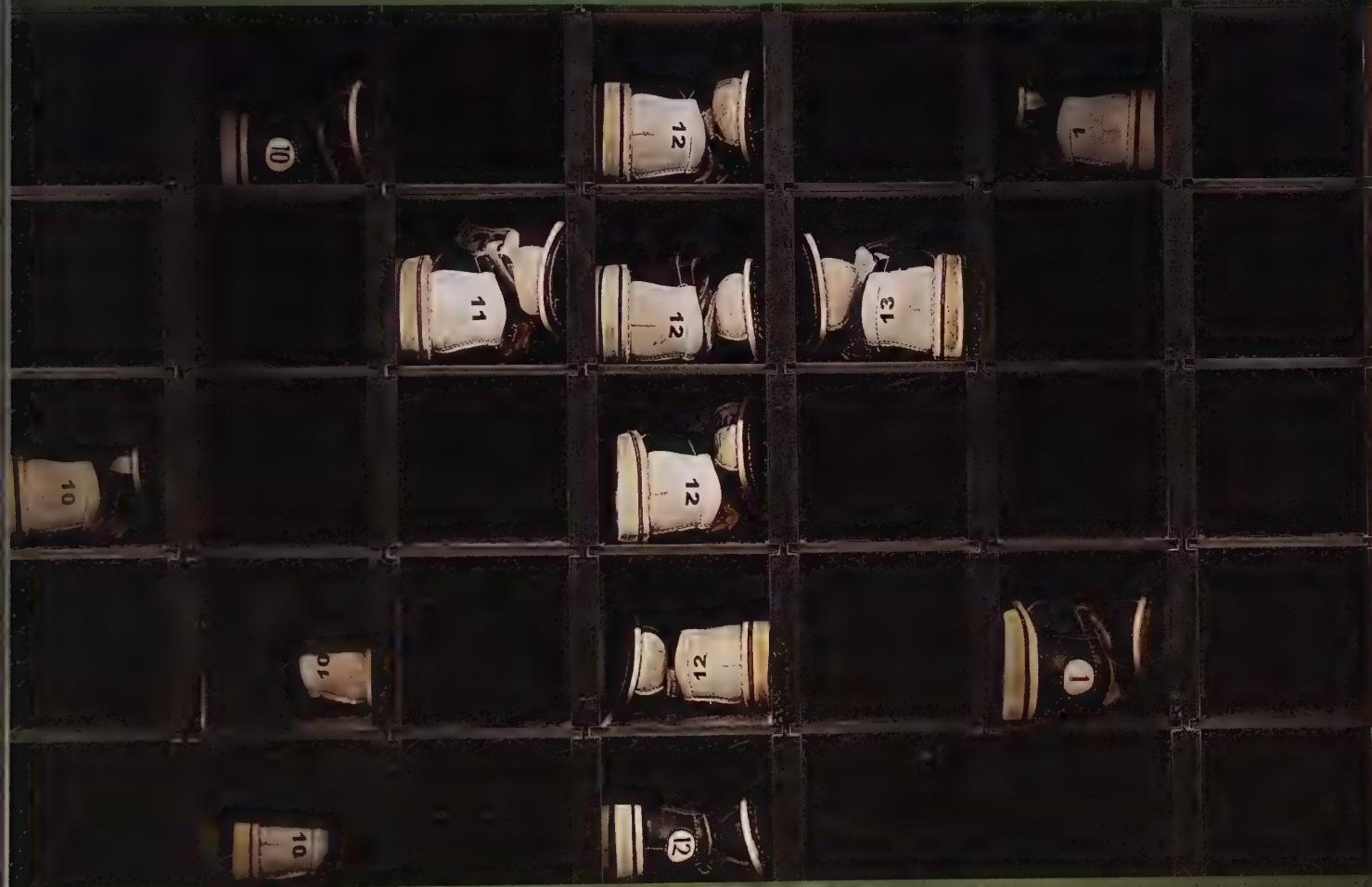
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BIBLE STUDY ALONG THE WAY SESSION 3



ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

by Julie A. Kanarr

Materials you will need

- Postcards (or blank 3x4 or 4x6 index cards)
- Optional: paper and colored pencils/pens/markers for faith/life map activity
- Bible
- *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW)

Theme Verse

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

(Luke 24:35)

Road Map

Throughout this study, we have been traveling with a variety of biblical travelers. In this final session, we explore two different journeys of faith, listening in on two different conversations with those who met Jesus “along the way.” First, we will join the woman who met Jesus as he traveled through Samaria. Then we will walk along with Cleopas and his companion as they make their way to Emmaus. Along the way, we will ponder how Christ meets us in our journey of faith. In what places are we surprised to dis-

cover how Christ has come among us? Among whom are we led to share the good news of Jesus Christ?

Preparing the Way

Sing “Let us ever walk with Jesus” (ELW 802)

Reflect on a time when you have been surprised by someone you have met along the way. Perhaps it was a casual conversation that went deeper. Perhaps you participated in an unexpected act of hospitality that resulted in you seeing another person in a whole new way. What happened?

Conversation at the Well

READ JOHN 4:1-26.

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman as he journeys through Samaria on his

way from Judea to Galilee. She—like many others in John’s Gospel—serves as a representative figure. Jesus not only speaks to her, but speaks through her to us, as we listen in on their conversation.

The mutual dislike between the Judeans and the Samaritans was rooted in the ancient political, tribal, and religious divisions between northern and southern kingdoms of Israel that began centuries before the time of Jesus. While they shared a common ancestry and a common faith, significant religious differences held them apart.

The Samaritans honored Jacob as their great patriarch, believed that the Messiah would be a prophetic figure like Moses, and viewed Mt. Gerizim as their sacred mountain and place of worship. In contrast, the Judeans (“the Jews” of John’s Gospel) centered their hopes on the Messiah as a kingly figure like David who would restore Israel’s monarchy and centered their worship life in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Throughout their conversation, the Samaritan woman is exploring whether this man at the well may be the Messiah. When he offers her living water, she playfully challenges him that he doesn’t seem to have the necessary tools to deliver on his promises and questions his underlying claim that he is greater than their ancestor Jacob.

When he asks her to call her husband, she acknowledges that she doesn’t have one. While many interpreters of this passage have assumed that Jesus is passing judgment on her personal life, one can also hear his statement about her five husbands as a reference to Samaria’s history. The prophet Hosea had indicted Israel for its adultery and idolatry for their intermarriages, political alliances, and religious syncretism (see Hosea 2:2).

When the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., they had brought people from five different nations into Samaria to colonize it (2 Kings 17:24). These foreigners occupied the land and

intermarried with the local people. The status of having had “five husbands” and now committing adultery with a sixth would sum up the Judeans’ low opinion about the Samaritans.

Her recognition of Jesus’ prophetic voice is about his naming the truth, not his ability to perceive secrets. Her concern is not about personal morality or family values. She is not trying to distract him by flattery and changing the subject.

After connecting him with Jacob and identifying him as a prophet, now she quizzes this potential Messiah about worship. With this question, she has now addressed all three aspects of messianic credentials that were important to the Samaritans. Jesus transcends her either-or question and speaks of worship in spirit and truth. When she directly expresses her hopes for the coming Messiah, Jesus responds with the words “I am,” echoing the divine name God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (see Exodus 3:14). Their entire conversation has been leading to this point.

REST STOP

1. What are the surprising features of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman?
2. Imagine that you have come to the well and found Jesus sitting there. What would your conversation be like?

Come and See, Go and Tell

READ JOHN 4:27–42.

She runs back to the village and invites others to come and see, leading them to Christ. What began with the woman’s first-person confession (“I know that the messiah is coming”) broadens into the plural (“he will declare to us”) and in response to the woman’s testimony, stretches out to the Samaritans’ acclamation of Jesus as the savior of the world (4:42).

Although some have interpreted the Samaritan community’s response to her testimony as dismissive,

it follows a common pattern in John's Gospel. Those who first hear about Jesus from others are invited to come and see for themselves. There are no indirect disciples in John.

John the Baptist points Andrew toward following Jesus. When Andrew responds to Jesus' invitation to "come and see," he invites Simon to join him. When Jesus calls Philip to follow him, Philip invites Nathaniel, encouraging him to "come and see" (see 1:35–46). In John 12:21 some Greeks approach Philip, wishing to see Jesus. After the resurrection, when the other disciples tell Thomas that they have seen the risen Lord, he responds that he needs to see for himself (John 20:24–29). The Samaritan woman's invitation to her community shares this pattern. Her testimony forms the bridge for the Samaritan community to come to faith in Christ.

Jesus, who had to go through Samaria geographically in order to travel from Judea to Samaria, leads his followers to grasp the divine necessity of reaching out to Samaria. Samaria is not a place to pass though, but a destination for mission in its own right. Jesus notes that the fields are ripe and ready for harvest. Jesus' travels to Samaria where he initiates a conversation with the woman at the well, sets a pattern for the Christian community's pattern of missionary outreach. (See "Who? Me? A Refugee?" p. 12.)

REST STOP

3. In what ways is the Samaritan woman transformed through her conversation with Christ?
4. Where is Samaria for you? Is it a place that you go to, go through, live in, or avoid?

Write a postcard from Samaria, noting your thoughts, feelings, questions, and reflections. You might want to write from the stance of the Samaritan woman about the stranger she met at the well.

On the Road to Emmaus

READ LUKE 24:13–27.

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, the two disciples walking to Emmaus also serve as representative figures, through whom we are invited into the story to consider how Jesus meets us "along the way." They are Cleopas and a companion. Luke does not offer any information about the companion's identity or gender. The absence of detail leaves open the possibility that Cleopas' companion may be his wife, and that they may be on their way back to their home in Emmaus following a Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

As they walk along, they discuss the events which had led to the crucifixion of Jesus and the amazing story about his rising from the dead. They are joined by a mysterious stranger who meets them along the way. They speak of their dashed hopes.

Their traveling companion listens to their story, and in turn, offers them a fresh perspective. He leads them to a new, deepened understanding of the Hebrew scriptures that resurrects their hope. As they walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they also journey from despair to hope.

REST STOP

5. Imagine that you are walking with two disciples on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. What is their journey like? What are they seeing and hearing? How are they feeling? What are they thinking about?
6. In your own journey of faith, what do you struggle with or wonder about?

In the Breaking of the Bread

READ LUKE 24:28–35.

As they arrive in Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion invite the stranger to stay with them, a customary gesture of hospitality. (See "Traveling Mercies: Hospitality," p. 6.) On the road, this stranger had become the

guide and teacher. Now he shifts from the role of guest to that of host, taking bread, blessing it, and giving it to them.

They recognize the presence of the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread, and reflect back on their conversation with him on the road, how their hearts had burned within them as he opened the scriptures to them. The two disciples rise from the table, and quickly retrace their steps. They return to Jerusalem to share the good news with the others. They follow the same path, but on a different journey, as they joyfully tell their story to the rest of the gathered community.

Although the risen Christ has “vanished from sight,” he is not absent. In their conversation on the road, and in sharing in the breaking of the bread, he remains among his followers. By his presence, we are fed for the journey and strengthened for mission.

REST STOP

7. What do you think the disciples’ journey was like as they traveled from Emmaus back to Jerusalem?
8. Where is Emmaus for you? Has there been a time when the Scripture has opened to you, where you have moved to a new or deeper understanding of them?

Write a postcard from Emmaus, noting your questions, insights, and reflections about the text and your own journey of faith. You might wish to write from the stance of Cleopas or his companion as they talk about their trip to Jerusalem.

At journey’s end

In these three sessions, we have met and traveled with a variety of different biblical characters. While each of their journeys has been different, they have shared common paths. Along the way, each has encountered God, and experienced transformation. Jacob wrestles with God, receives a new name, and emerges with a limp

and a promise. The ancient Israelites are fed with daily manna, even as they walk a rocky path of complaining and learning to trust in God. The prophet Elijah escapes from danger is fed and strengthened and sent back with a new mission. The Samaritan woman and the disciples going to Emmaus encounter Christ. They joyfully share the good news, leading others to faith. As we have walked with them, may we also be encouraged and strengthened for our own journey of faith.

Optional: Further Exploration

Complete the faith/life map (or maps) that you have been working on during this study. You may wish to draw in those who have been companions and guides along the way. You may also wish to mark those times and places where you have had significant conversations or come to new and deeper understandings of God’s presence and love.

Are there wellsprings of living water? Are there roads where your “heart has burned within you?” Are there places like Emmaus where you have recognized Christ in the breaking of the bread? Identify those times and places on your map. (See “At Every Table,” p. 16.)

Closing

Gather your postcards. Re-read them, and share them with your group as you desire. You may also show and describe your faith/life map(s).

After a time for silence, pray together:

Gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, a mind to meditate on you; eyes to behold you; ears to listen for your word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (*ELW*, page 76)

The Rev. Julie A. Kanarr an ELCA pastor from Port Townsend, Wash., enjoys bicycling, sea kayaking, hiking, camping, and writing.



LEADER GUIDE ALONG THE WAY SESSION 3

ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

by Julie A. Kanarr



Session Overview

While the three sessions of this study share the common theme of a journey, each session stands on its own as an independent unit. There are two questions at the end of each section. The first is intended to guide participants in reflecting on the meaning of the text, and the second invites participants to reflect on their own life and faith journey in light of the text. While the leader guide provides some suggested responses, there are no right or wrong answers. The responses in the leader guide may serve to jump-start stalled conversations among participants or open up new avenues for reflection.

Conversation at the Well

1. The woman is surprised because by talking with her, Jesus is crossing two social barriers: one between Jews and Samaritans, and the other between men and women. By initiating a conversation with her, Jesus demonstrates openness, outreach, and hospitality. Jesus listens to the Samaritan woman and responds

to her probing questions. They engage in a serious conversation about genuine matters of faith that are of concern for her. Like the well they are sitting at, the conversation moves ever deeper, until it reaches the living water of understanding and faith, and bubbles up to new life.

2. Participants may have a wide variety of responses. Some participants may wonder who would begin the conversation. Some may have questions that they would like to ask Jesus. Some may be drawn to the idea of Jesus listening to them with compassion and openness.

Come and See, Go and Tell

3. The Samaritan woman is transformed from an inquirer, who is curious about Jesus and what he has to offer, to an evangelist, who tells others about Jesus and draws them to Christ. Along the way, she engages in theological dialogue with Jesus and confesses her faith. Her initial surprise that Jesus would initiate a conversation with her is transformed to confident faith and joy.

4. Participants may identify a wide variety of places as Samaria for them. Some participants may find that they need to reflect deeply in order to respond to the question. For some, Samaria may be a place of “living water” where all are welcome at the well. For others, Samaria may be a place where they have experienced prejudice. For others, Samaria may be a place to reach out and share God’s love. For some, Samaria may be that place where they find it challenging to welcome those who they have cast in the role of “other.” For others, Samaria may be a place where they are surprised to find Christ. For some, Samaria may be a place where Jesus sits down with them and responds to their questions.

On the Road to Emmaus

5. The past tense of the verb “hoped” suggests the depth of despair Cleopas and his companion felt about the death of their friend Jesus. They are also grieving the loss of their hope. They may be walking slowly, feeling sad and confused, and worried about their future. They may be wondering what to believe. They may be trying to make sense of the rumors they had heard. They may be having doubts or a crisis of faith. It may have been the longest seven mile walk of their lives. They may be surprised that the person who joins them seems unaware of the recent events that were so important for them.
6. Participants may express a variety of responses. Some may experience doubts and questions. Some may experience their “hearts burning within them.” Some may be struggling with despair or loss of hope. Others may wonder where Christ is present within the world today. Some may be yearning for a closer walk with Jesus. Some may be thankful for a steady faith.

In the Breaking of the Bread

7. Their journey back to Jerusalem was quick and joyful. Having trudged from Jerusalem to Emmaus, now they’re back, practically bursting through the door to tell the others about their encounter with the risen Christ. As they look back in hindsight, they are able to connect their experience of recognizing the Risen Christ in the breaking of the bread to their recognition

of his presence with them on the road. They see that Christ, walking with them, becomes the guide for their understanding of the Scripture. With joy and amazement, they asked each other “did not our hearts burn within us as he opened the Scripture to us?”

8. Participants may experience Emmaus as any place where they recognize Christ in their midst. Some may name Holy Communion as their Emmaus. Emmaus may be the place that they are “on the road to find.” Participants may reflect on the ways that the gospel speaks to them. Some may choose to share stories from their own lives about people, such as pastors, parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, and others, who have helped them to understand the Scripture and grow in faith.

Optional: Further Exploration

Provide paper and writing/drawing materials for participants to map their journey of life and faith. Some may desire to continue to work on the map they began in session 1. Some may wish to create a new map. Invite participants to think about those who have been companions on their journey, especially those who have served as guides and teachers along the way. Encourage them also to look for places where, like the disciples at Emmaus, may have had their hearts burning within them.

At Journey’s End

At the end of your study, you may wish to use this blessing and dismissal after the closing prayer found on page 43:

LEADER: The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keeps our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

ALL: Amen.

LEADER: Go in peace, Christ be with you.

ALL: Thanks be to God. 

What to expect from
GATHERED BY GOD

by Audrey West



Audrey West

September marks the first session of the 2012–13 Bible study, “Gathered by God.” When the editors invited me to write another Bible study (I wrote the 2004–05 study on parables, “Everyday Surprises,”) I jumped at the chance, particularly when they asked for a study on the word *gather*. After all, a lot of gathering takes place in the Bible.

In the beginning, God gathers the waters at creation, making order out of chaos and forming the lands on which we live. The Israelites gather manna in the wilderness; shepherds gather their sheep and kings gather their people.

xiles are gathered from afar when God brings them back to the land. Nations gather for war; the assembly gathers for worship; crowds gather around Jesus; disciples gather for prayer; whole cities gather to hear prophets, priests and preachers proclaim the deeds of God.

There are other gatherings as well. The synagogue derives its name from the Greek word, *synagōgē* (pronounce soo-nah-go-GEH), which means “gathering” or “assembly.” Another Greek word, *ekklēsia* (pronounce ek-leh-SEE-ah), typically translated “church” in the New Testament, has a similar meaning: “gathering, assembly, or congregation.” Each of these terms, *synagōgē* and *ekklēsia*, is found in ancient manuscripts of both Old and New Testaments.

VARIETIES OF GATHERINGS

I have a personal connection to the theme of gather, as well. When I was younger, I used to gather on occasion with an odd group at a campground located at the farthest edge of Northern California. There were high-school dropouts and people with doctorates, homeowners, and shelter-dwellers. Key participants included an asparagus farmer, a sheep rancher, a veterinarian and a librarian; a vegan and a deer-hunter; an auto mechanic and a telephone lineman.

They had gathered annually for

more than three decades. I joined them a few times, when school or work schedules made it possible. I sang the campfire songs, took my turn cooking in the cast-iron skillets, and sat in rapt attention to the stories.

I learned of a migrant childhood following the crops around the Western United States, of a piano tied to the back of the truck to provide music wherever they went, of learning to read with the only book available (a Bible), of finally landing in a rented house after more than 10 years on the road, only to watch the place burn to the ground a short while later.

I loved these stories as a child, and I treasure them now even more. They are the recollections of my father and his seven siblings, that motley group of campers who gathered each year for their family reunion.

Their stories remind me of biblical accounts, such as the wandering of the Israelites, the Feeding of the 5,000, or Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard. They bring to mind the role of music among the gathered people of God, preserved for us in the psalms. My family’s stories have helped me to understand the stories of the Bible and how Scripture has shaped my identity as a member of the family of God.

Family reunions represent one kind of gathering, but people gather for a variety of other purposes as

well. Friends gather to share a meal, witness a wedding, grieve a loss, or celebrate a life. We gather to work for justice, campaign against hunger, raise money for causes large and small. We gather to support, and we gather to protest. We gather our voices in song, in cheers, and sometimes in shouts of anger. We gather for peace and we gather for war.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The nine sessions of this Bible study explore some of the reasons or purposes for which we are “Gathered by God.” We are gathered for rest, for shelter, for life, for fellowship, and for sharing stories that remind us who we are. We are gathered to experience the presence of God, to learn, to be empowered, and to be sent as God’s witnesses in a world created by God’s own gathering hand.

Each month’s study will focus on a key verse drawn from the New Testament, typically from one of the gospels or the book of Acts. We will occasionally peer through the window of the biblical text into the social and cultural world in which the events took place, as well as into the time period during which those events were written down. The gospels and the letters of Paul, for example, were written several decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the communities for which they were written were often situated in very different contexts

from the locale and culture in which Jesus engaged in his ministry.

A few decades might not seem like much. However, in the years between Jesus' resurrection and the writing of the gospels, the Jerusalem Temple—the political, economic, and religious center of Jewish life in the first century—was destroyed by the Roman army. That devastating event had a radical impact on the culture and society in which the earliest followers of Jesus experienced and practiced their faith.

To illustrate the difference a few decades can make today, we might consider the cultural, economic, and political changes brought about by the 9/11 attacks or the 2008 crash of the stock market and ensuing global economic crisis. Many, many people experience the world now in a very different way than they did before those events took place.

GATHERED TO LEARN

In addition to social and historical issues, our study will also consider literary questions about the biblical writings. What is the original meaning of this or that word? What echoes from other scriptures do we hear as we listen to this text? What might the author be trying to emphasize by writing in this way?

A key assumption behind these questions is that the biblical writers were deeply concerned to convey the truth about the meaning of the

events and experiences about which they wrote.

Questions, insights, and experiences brought to each study group by the participants are another significant element of this study. Just as the Bible includes a diverse collection of writings, so too are its readers a diverse collection of people, each with experiences of God and what God is doing in their lives and communities through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

It is no accident that the biblical writers so often speak of people in the plural—Israelites, people of God, crowds, disciples, churches, and so forth—because God's gifts come in plural form. Although it is certainly possible to work through this study on your own, it is designed to work best as a shared endeavor.

Along the way we will learn a little Greek, take a sideways glance at related themes, dig deeper into selected topics, share insights with one another, and seek to uncover and discover how God might be inviting us to know and experience ourselves, our neighbors, the world, and even God in new or different ways.

GATHERED FOR LIFE

In recent years my family's reunions have changed. Some of the siblings (my aunts and uncles) are no longer with us, and my father is approaching the end of his own life as well. Instead of camping beside a moun-

tain lake, we gather around a hospital bed in the middle of my parents' living room.

Dementia turns my father's memories into a mosaic of disconnected fragments, making it impossible for him to maintain his role as the family storyteller. The task falls now to his children who—like the disciples after the feeding of the 5,000—gather up the pieces and collect them by the basket-full as a guarantee that we will remember the stories that have shaped our lives.

Occasionally, when by our own efforts we cannot conjure the right words, we turn to music, just as we did beside campfires in seasons past: We sing my father's favorite hymn:

*Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod,
with its crystal tide forever flowing
by the throne of God? Yes, we'll gather
at the river, the beautiful, beautiful
river,*

*gather with the saints at the river
that flows by the throne of God.*

I invite you to bring your own stories and experiences to our upcoming Bible study, as together we are “Gathered by God.”

Audrey West is the author of the award-winning 2004 *Lutheran Woman Today* (now *Gather*) Bible study, “Everyday Surprises: The Parables of Jesus.” She has served most recently as visiting associate professor of Lutheran studies at Yale Divinity School. She lives in Bethlehem, Pa.



GRACE NOTES

Road Trips of Faith

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



Gather's summer Bible study, "Along the Way," has got me thinking about the memorable and life-changing road trips I've been part of because of Women of the ELCA. My first Women of the ELCA road trip occurred in the early 1990s. My synodical organization sponsored a bus trip to New Windsor, Md., where we explored the Lutheran World Relief warehouse (it's very cool to see all those quilts flattened out and bundled up, ready for distribution in faraway places), the Brethren Service Center, and a SERRV retail shop. Like two kids in a candy shop, my buddy Nancy and I spent the whole drive back going through the SERRV catalog, figuring out what we'd order for the first fair trade consignment sale at our synodical convention.

I was elected a delegate to the Second Triennial Convention (1993), and my college roommate Alison and I drove to Washington, D.C., for the convention. I don't recall too much about the drive down, but I distinctly remember the drive back. Bread for the Journey had introduced us all to world music at the convention and Alison and I were hooked. We bought Bread for the Journey cassette tapes and sang along at very loud levels for most of the four-hour drive home!

Our 20th anniversary in 2007 brought with it a memorable road trip of international proportions. Around 80 women (and a few men) joined together for a "bold women of the Reformation" tour that wound through eastern Germany. We walked through the out-

door Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, worshipped at the Castle Church in Wittenberg, paused at Katharina von Bora Luther's grave in Torgau, listened to women describe their parts in the protests leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

A year later I was on a much different road trip, this one from Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, to Phebe Hospital, on to the Lutheran Training Institute (LTI), then to Curran Hospital and back to Monrovia. Lutheran women here in the United States set up endowment funds in the early 1900s, and the interest earned by those funds has supported health and education ministries at Phebe, LTI, and Curran for nearly a century. I also got to meet with women who had received a grant from our annual grant program. That grant provided both post-traumatic stress counseling following the extended civil war in Liberia and also job skills training (in soap-making).

I won't soon forget the sound of the dozen women or so singing and praising God as they came down the road at Phebe for our meeting.

Women coming together in song, women coming together to make a difference, women coming together for service and study: that's what my Women of the ELCA road trips have been about. Whether the road took me to New Windsor, Wash., Torgau, or Monrovia, all of these trips helped me live out our mission and purpose. I wonder which road the Holy Spirit will be leading me down next? ■■■

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

The World of Enough

by Catherine Malotky

God, I live in a land of

plenty. My home shelters me. Though I may be grumpy about the heat, I can choose to hide inside, shaded and cooled. Though sometimes there is friction with those I love, it fades, and I come home to love and affection. My pantry is full. Even my dogs, who leave trails of fur in my carpet, wag their tails when I come home to welcome me back. I can watch birds at my feeders and marvel at the squirrels who manage, once again, to find a way through our latest invention to dine at the feeders too.

For so many, this is not true. For so many, there is no place to shelter. If there is a house, there is no safety, inside or out. For so many, family is a danger or a grief. For so many, there is no family, no clan, just the barest of identities. For so many, food is always scarce. Hunger is a constant companion. Nature is no friend, but threat.

I am not of more value than so many. Why, then, God? What luck has come my way? To be born to healthy parents, members of the middle class, living in safe places with good schools? To be born healthy, bright enough to do well, surrounded by others much like me? Is this your blessing? Surely not because I am better, more chosen, more loved by you.

Because it would not take much to slip into different luck. A few unfortunate choices, a catastrophe, an accident. It would not take much for any of us.

What shall I make of my good fortune? How is it that I should be faithful

with these, with my many gifts? I know when I am not. When I am envious of another—a nicer countertop, job, health, travel, networks, talent—I am distracted from the abundance you lavish on me, and I see scarcity instead.

When I squander my luck—my resources, my health, my loves—I fail to live in gratitude for all that you have given me. When I hoard my good fortune—my wisdom, my energy, my skills—I turn in on myself and neglect the ministry of service to which you have called me.

It takes courage, God. It takes courage to live in the face of luck, to be open to the discomfort of seeing so many of your children suffering in contrast to my most abundant life. It takes courage to trust your provision enough to part with my stuff, to decide how much is enough, and then live with just enough.

You provided for the people of Israel as they faced the wilderness. They were to gather just enough manna. Too much and the rest would spoil. Isn't that true for me? For us? Doesn't too much become a tantalizing distraction that draws our eyes away from our dependence on you and the truth of our place in the body of Christ with *all* your children?

Cure my arrogance, God. Invite me to the world of enough, that I might be nourished at your table and see the wonder of your providing. Amen.

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pastor, serves at Luther Seminary as a philanthropic adviser. She has served as a parish pastor, editor, teacher, and retreat leader.



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